

Witnessing the Violence of Modern Exile: An Examination of the Relationship Between
the Image, the Spectator, and the Context of Photographs of Pain and Suffering

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Legal Studies

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

On September 2, 2015, the image of a young Syrian boy's body lying on a beach in Turkey immediately rose public awareness of, and drew media attention to, the refugee crisis surrounding Europe's sea borders, which serves as the starting point of this dissertation. The photograph, its reception, and the context it was taken in all raise several questions regarding the violent conditions of modern exile, the communicative potential of images, and the limits of the spectator's reading of a photograph depicting the pain and suffering of an Other. This dissertation is therefore primarily concerned with the two topics of exile and photography, and challenges the assumption that certain photographs, like the one of a drowned Syrian toddler, are guaranteed to engage the audience and result in positive social change to end the pain and suffering witnessed.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my supervisor and second reader, Daniel McNeil and Neil Sargent for working with me on this dissertation, but also throughout my two years at Carleton. I have taken classes with both professors, which have become crucial to the development of my project and the writing of my thesis. From Prof. McNeil's class I was introduced to the ideas, theories, and perspectives that influenced my later work, and from Prof. Sargent's class I learned how to expand and formulate my initial thoughts and interests into a larger research project. I am also deeply grateful for having been able to work with Prof. McNeil and Prof. Sargent on my MA thesis, and I am especially thankful for their unfailing support, kindness, and patience throughout the entire process.

Second I would like to thank Peter Swan and Amy Bartholomew, who are professors that I had the pleasure of taking class with in my first year of the MA program. While I enjoyed both their classes, it is their encouragement, advice, and reassurance outside of the course and in terms of my decision to pursue the thesis option that I value most.

Finally, I would like to thank the many and various migrants in my family, whose mobility, forced or otherwise, has meant that I can stay, live, and learn in the same place that I was born and raised in.

In memory of my grandfather, Jan Gileta (20 April 1931 – 17 August 2015).

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In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the drama begins when Antigone, daughter and sister of the late King Oedipus, defies the reigning king's orders disallowing the proper burial of her brother, Polyneices, due to his march on Thebes in an attempt to force his brother Eteocles out of rule. Antigone acts out of a fundamental recognition of the familial relation between herself and her brother, and in doing so, acts against the law constituted by King Creon's decree denying Polyneices his burial rites. She is inevitably caught in caring for and honouring her brother's body and mourning his life as she believed a sister should. Creon feels himself bound by his own law to order Antigone's death by shutting her in a tomb, and puts aside his own connection with Antigone from her engagement to his son and heir, Haemon. The tragedy ends when Creon, who initially rejected Haemon's petition to reconsider Antigone's fate, concedes to his son's wishes and opens the tomb with the intention of releasing Antigone. He finds, instead, that she had hung herself and that Haemon had stabbed himself upon discovering Antigone's body, which drives his wife Eurydice to commit suicide as well. Creon is finally left without a son, without a wife, without an heir, and thus without any of the familial relations he had repeatedly relegated as secondary to upholding his own laws as king of Thebes.¹

The conflict between Antigone and Creon reflects their differing understanding of what principles take precedence in governing their lives and decisions. Creon maintains his orders and decrees as king are indisputable and foundational to the proper functioning of society. He expects a strict adherence to the law from all his subjects, regardless of their potential connections with himself. He does not place his relationship to Antigone or

¹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *Greek Tragedies I: Aeschylus: Agamemnon, Prometheus Bound; Sophocles: Oedipus the King, Antigone; Euripides: Hippolytus*, ed. Mark Griffith et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

to his son above maintaining order through the application of his edicts. Antigone, alternatively, prioritizes her familial ties with her brother before man-made law and honours the burial customs that pre-date Creon's rule. She recognizes that the decree against mourning Polyneices and according him his burial rites violates a more fundamental principle that cannot and should not be contradicted. Antigone therefore observes her duties as a grieving sister and provides a proper funeral for her brother, conscious of the risks and consequences she must face if discovered breaking the king's law. In doing so, she denies Creon's attempt to render Polyneices' life not worth mourning and his death as being meaningful to or having an effect on no one. Antigone rejects the law's denunciation of the grieveability of her brother's life, asserting instead that Polyneices' life mattered to and was connected with her own. Thus, she does not obey the edict that excludes her brother's life from the concern of Creon's subjects due to a recognition of her pre-existing relationship with Polyneices and the responsibility it entails.

This tension between the law, represented by Creon as king of Thebes, and the fundamental interrelationality between subjects, which guides Antigone's choices, is a theme central to this dissertation, the arguments it presents, and the literature that informs them. The focus of this work is targeted on the legal means through which certain lives are excluded, or exiled, from counting as human and thus as publically grieveable, and the discussion is primarily directed towards the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe. It adopts the principle of cohabitation to extend the relationship between Antigone and her brother, which motivates her actions in the play, beyond the family and to humanity as a whole. Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler elaborate on the importance of cohabitation in

their respective writings on Nazi Germany and the Israeli state. The basic premise of cohabitation, according to Arendt and Butler, is that “those with whom we cohabit the earth are given to us, prior to choice and so prior to any social or political contracts we might enter through deliberation and volition.”² As a result, attempts to manipulate the heterogeneity of the global population and to choose with whom to inhabit the earth amount to genocidal practices for both scholars in the specific contexts they each write about. Global institutions and policies must therefore accept the fundamental and pre-existing character of “open-ended and plural cohabitation” that should not be altered or argued with. To do so would risk “regarding some part of the population as socially dead, as redundant, or as intrinsically unworthy of life and therefore ungrievable.”³

The purpose of introducing Arendt and Butler’s understanding of cohabitation is not to suggest the management of the refugee crisis in Europe amounts to genocide, or to equate the conditions of contemporary refugees to the victims of Nazi Germany or to Palestinians in Israel. But it does not follow that the clear and necessary distinctions between the three events mean that only the actions of Nazi Germany and the Israeli state can be identified as violence committed against a particular population. In these identified cases, there is a shared element of the exclusion of certain groups and the prevention of their full and equal belonging to the citizenry of a nation-state. That the various responses to the refugee crisis do not go as far towards explicitly homogenizing a given population as in the previous examples does not negate or diminish the violence contemporary migrants suffer.

² Judith Butler, “Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26 no. 2 (2012): 143.

³ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

Given the focus on the current refugee crisis, the significant differences between designations like refugee, migrant, asylum seeker, and displaced or stateless person, and the reintroduction of the notion of exile, some clarification of their meanings to the presented arguments and uses throughout this dissertation is necessary. The terms listed fall into two categories, those being ones that have a specific definition and those that are used more broadly to encompass multiple experiences and statuses. Refugee, asylum seeker, and stateless person belong to the former, and migrant and displaced person belong to the latter. An individual crossing nation-state borders is a migrant, whereas a displaced person is one who leaves her home, whether that includes leaving her country or not. An asylum seeker is an individual migrating to a different nation-state in the hopes of receiving refugee status, though her claim is yet to be determined or will not be determined in the case of her death prior to reaching the new country. A refugee therefore is an individual who has been recognized as such, and who has been promised the attendant international guarantees and protections. Finally, a stateless person is an individual without formal citizenship to any nation-state, and cannot be returned or deported since no country will accept her. The use of exile serves a very distinct purpose separate from the designations and statuses outlined thus far. It is not being suggested as a more general, over-arching umbrella term for such different variations of the same basic phenomenon. Instead, exile is used to denote something more than what is otherwise understood by those words commonly used in reference to the identified refugee crisis at the center of this project. Such terms are predominantly tied to notions of the nation-state, its territorial borders, and belonging to its community in a formal and legal sense. Exile, alternatively, can be helpful in thinking beyond the imposed structure of the nation-state.

For instance, unlike the designation “transnational,” the word exile can describe the increasingly more vast and regular movements of people on a planetary scale without continuing to center the nation-state framework. It can additionally account for realities of marginalization and experiences of alienation within a community, and thus challenge the assertions of equality among all citizens and the reliance on formal legal statuses as the sole or primary determinants of belonging.

However, the project recognizes that the law does not act alone in the determination of some bodies as recognizably human and others as somehow less than human. While not attempting to diminish the significance and material impact that formal statuses have on an individual, it must also be stressed that the law is not the only source of meaning-making, or one that deserves to be privileged above others. Thus, this work considers the role of photographs and images of pain as an equally influential method through which the loss and suffering of certain lives are communicated as grieveable and others are rationalized as regrettable, but ultimately necessary. As opposed to assuming that photographs are the uncompromised result of the camera’s faithful capture of a particular scene, the presented analysis adopts a more fluid approach to reading images as a text, which requires a broader consideration of the circumstances that a photograph was taken in, the context it is circulated through, and the audience that views and engages with it.

In the scholarship on photography and the potential power of an image to communicate with its viewers and to initiate a fundamental and noticeable change in the spectators, there exist two contrasting positions. The first maintains that photographs, even when showing death and suffering, cannot fully communicate with an audience and

adequately make them understand the often violent conditions depicted and the reasons for them. Images are furthermore susceptible to manipulation and distortion, rendering their representation of the realities and experiences of the photographic subjects limited. Such photographs therefore cannot be relied upon to effect a meaningful change in society and the ways in which it is ordered. The second position counters that such an understanding of images is overly restrictive and denies the agency of the photographic subject and the spectator to communicate with and recognize one another. It advocates for an expanded notion of photography that accepts and is based on the unsettled-ness of the image, the message of the subject, and the interpretation of the viewer. It additionally asserts that the first position over-determines the abilities of the photographer and the means of circulation to define what a photograph conveys and how it is received.

The approach of this dissertation to the image is a dialectic one, placed in between these two arguments, and begins by acknowledging the worth and contributions of both. The insistence of the second position on the agency of the photographic subject and the spectator is an important observation that cannot be neglected, and the consequent openness of the image to multiple readings should not be diminished. Nonetheless, these scholars risk overlooking the significant obstacles that exist for the spectator to critically engage with a photograph of an Other's pain, and to recognize her own implication in the circumstances causing the violence. As such, established ways of seeing, knowing, and understanding influence the context in which an image is disseminated, and the extent to which the audience can read the life of the Other as human and acknowledge her suffering as unnecessary instead of merely regrettable. What is suggested therefore is an

approach to photographs based on the tension between the two opposing positions, and attempts to temper the extremes of each argument by referencing the other.

The arguments of this dissertation are presented in the ensuing four chapters, beginning with a literature review of the texts most crucial to the work presented. First, Judith Butler introduces the question of when is life grieveable and thus recognized as human, which fundamentally guides this project. She focuses on the importance of public mourning, insisting that when death is presented as a loss, it is premised on the acknowledgment that there was something that could be lost in that life, and it is now worth grieving. Those deaths that are not mourned consequently do not count as human, and are more often represented as casualties, which implies the death is regrettable though necessary, and the lives are understood as less than human. These lives are therefore excluded from the predominant notion of what is accepted as a loss, what is grieved, and what is comprehended as human. Thus, the proposed means of articulating and formulating this exclusion from the human is through the notion of exile, particularly as presented by Edward Said. As a Palestinian living in the United States, Said is able to address both the formal aspect of contemporary exile as a status created through law and the attending feeling of separation from what is familiar experienced individually. Each characteristic is further elaborated on by Hannah Arendt and Eli Clare, respectively. Arendt expands on the political element of exile in discussing the nature of modern statelessness and human rights. Clare presents instead a visualization of the sense of alienation that accompanies the realities of living in exile by relating it to how oppression feels for those socially marginalized. When read together, these otherwise disparate theorists suggest a more comprehensive understanding of the condition of exile, its

constructed nature, and its violence. This conceptualization of exile is used to further Butler's analysis of the grieveability of life by addressing the question of what it means for those whose deaths are not mourned and whose lives are not recognized as human.

The approach adopted in the project to begin answering the questions posed thus far is to analyze selected photographs that depict different forms of exile and the lives of children that are mourned to varying degrees by the audience. The first chapter therefore ends by establishing the methodology used in the examination of the three images that are the focus of the remaining chapters. Several theorists are presented in order to formulate an understanding of photographs of pain that does not diminish the agency of the subject or spectator to speak and respond to one another, but that also does not neglect the established, and primarily racialized, ways of knowing and seeing which limit the communicative potential of such images. This latter section of the literature review begins with Susan Sontag, who writes specifically about witnessing the pain of an Other through photography, and who is ultimately unconvinced of the image's ability to adequately convey the complexity of the violence suffered to the viewer without a supplementary narrative. Ariella Azoulay is positioned in opposition to Sontag, and emphasizes instead the powerful relationship between the spectator and the photographic subject, both of whom belong equally to the citizenry of photography, and whose actions and understanding cannot be determined by other actors, such as the photographer or the media which circulates the image. Azoulay thus proposes an ethics of the spectator to recognize the grievance presented by the photographic subject and her claim as a citizen governed alongside the spectator, despite the difference in formal legal status that may exist between the two.

To begin formulating an approach based on the responsibility of the audience towards the Other that also considers the existing obstacles to fully and critically engaging with a photograph of pain, the dissertation next introduces Roland Barthes' conceptualization of myths, and his three-part framework for reading images as a text. His interpretation of photographs as symbols that can be emptied of their meaning, continually filled with a partial and motivated version of reality, and result in a distorted meaning of what is natural and what is historical serves as the basis for the adopted methodology in the ensuing chapters. However, though Barthes admits that the message of the image is not static or unchanging, he does not fully pursue the implications of the fluidity of myths, and so the metaphor of viscous porosity is borrowed from Nancy Tuana. Tuana cautions that events and realities are not singular, and consequently cannot be designated as solely natural or solely cultural. She attends instead to the plurality of phenomena like Hurricane Katrina as expressed in the phrase viscous porosity, which provides a helpful way to describe the inherent instability of myths and the meanings of photographs. Lastly, the openness of the image to multiple interpretations and the resultant effect of this basic characteristic of the visual is presented through Jacques Ranciere, his notion of the emancipated spectator, and his theorization of politics and aesthetics. Ranciere's writing provides a final link between photographs, political action, and structural change that relates the presented approach to reading images as a text back to the initial concerns of this work with experiences of exile and the grieveability of life.

Following the literature review, the three remaining chapters each focus on a different example of the violence of living in exile through photographs of a child's suffering. The first case study is of Emmett Till's image, taken in 1955 at his open casket

funeral and closely connected with the civil rights movement in the United States. Till, a fourteen year-old African American, had been lynched while in Mississippi by at least two white men for his interactions with a married white woman. Neither of the men were convicted at their trial for Till's kidnapping and murder, and few black Americans familiar with the ways of the South at the time expected the verdict to be any different. Thus, despite formally belonging to the nation-state in which they were born, African Americans were hardly regarded or treated as equal citizens by the state and by society, most notably in the South. Their bodies were racialized and their lives were consequently identified as less human than those of white Americans. The image of Till's beaten face, however, was recognized as human, and his life was accepted as one worth mourning by the wider public in the North. The photograph represented both the violence done to him and his mother's suffering for losing her only child in such a brutal way. This first case study therefore elaborates on how Till's image overcame the exile he experienced in life and contributed to the ongoing fight for civil rights in the United States during the mid-twentieth century.

The final two case studies both center on photographs selected from the current migrant crisis along the border between Europe and the Middle East, and specifically on the situations of children crossing the Mediterranean and Aegean seas. The first of the two images is that of Alan Kurdi's drowned body lying on a beach in Bodrum, Turkey, which was captured and circulated in early September 2015. This photograph rapidly heightened public awareness of the increasing scale of migrants attempting to reach Europe from Turkey by the Aegean Sea, and the frequent drownings that are often only reported as numbers of individuals who died. A common interpretation of the impact of

Kurdi's image is that he provided those geographically removed from the immediate context with a face they could recognize their own children in, thus humanizing the crisis. Though the photograph inspired some response from Western nation-states and the general public, it has not yet resulted in significant structural change that can diminish the number of migrants risking their lives and those of their families to be smuggled to Europe. Unlike the previous image of Till's mutilated body, Kurdi's almost serene corpse initiated limited and superficial responses to the violence that caused his death, since the focus was on the illegal sea crossings and the drownings themselves instead of the various complex reasons that caused so many to take such drastic measures to leave their homes. As such, this second case study examines the wider biopolitical context of the refugee crisis in which Kurdi's drowning occurred, and the obstacles for a predominantly Western audience to fully recognizing the violence of exile as represented by the toddler's death.

In opposition to the first two case studies that discuss images of the dead bodies of children who had been excluded from counting as entirely human, the final one centers on a life that has not ended, but continues to live in exile and suffer from its violence. The photograph was taken in October 2013, from the detention center on the Italian island of Lampedusa, which lies closer to the northern coast of Africa than to the rest of Europe in the Mediterranean Sea. It depicts a young boy who survived the shipwreck that killed over 300 other asylum seekers sleeping on a bare mattress in the open air camp. Unlike the cases of Emmett Till and Alan Kurdi, very little is known about this child, including his name, his age, his family, his home, and why he had left to attempt to reach Europe. The anonymity of the Lampedusa child, as he will be referred to throughout this

dissertation, is due in part to his survival. The details and stories of the lives of Till and Kurdi were not known until they were viewed as corpses and publically mourned, thus individuating their suffering and the violence that ultimately led to their deaths. In Till's case, the circulation of his image was able to overcome this limitation and represent the reality of white supremacy in the United States that existed beyond the single instance of his lynching, though Kurdi's image was less effective in addressing the wider context of contemporary migrancy. The Lampedusa child, alternatively, did not die, and while it can be argued that, as a result, his life was not lost and therefore there is no reason to mourn him, this is not the position adopted in the final chapter. The final case study focuses instead on an exiled life that continues to endure the violence of its exclusion, in a geopolitical, spatial, and theoretical sense, and the consequent obstacle the Lampedusa child's experience of exile poses for the spectator to recognize his grievance against being let to die and his claim to citizenship and belonging. It considers the role of affect in determining the viewer's response to a photograph of a child subjected to violence, though who has not yet died from the poor material conditions of his life.

As such, the last two images contend with the issue of exile in a more direct and obvious way than the first in representing aspects of the current refugee crisis along the coasts of Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa. However, the argument advanced is that each of the three highlight distinct, though equally important, aspects of modern exile that begin to develop the concept into a more comprehensive one with the means to further and understand the exclusion of certain lives from practices of public mourning. In examining the photographs of differentially exiled children, this dissertation studies the role of images of pain as a form of communication between the subject and the

audience, asserting that significant obstacles exist to the spectator's full realization of the claims of the Other and their fundamental and pre-existing interrealtionality, despite the opposing ways in which their lives are governed.

The arguments, analyses, and approach of this dissertation to the issues surrounding grievability and the exiled life are largely directed by Judith Butler's book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, borrowing the guiding questions she poses as the primary focus of the readings of the selected images to come later. In the second chapter, entitled "Violence, Mourning, Politics," Butler identifies her main concern as critically addressing "the question of the human," clarifying that she is not preoccupied with defining a universal and shared human condition, but more specifically with examining "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What makes for a grievable life?" within the context of how recent global violence and the resultant suffering and deaths are reported on by the media.⁴ Butler begins by considering the body and its "condition of primary vulnerability," referring to the body's state of "being laid bare from the start [,] and with which we cannot argue."⁵ The first half of the statement suggests that, due to the body's physical existence, it is unwillingly exposed, laid bare, or "given over" to the gaze, touch, and violence of an Other.⁶ However, this shared condition of vulnerability and relationality to an Other does not limitedly refer to the potential violence a body may suffer, but to a wider range of touch "that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other."⁷ This conceptualization of the variation of ways in which the body is influenced by an Other is comparable to Michel Foucault's proposed understanding of biopolitics and the modern state's power over life, which is characterized as the right "to 'make' live

⁴ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

and ‘let’ die.”⁸ Foucault’s formulation of biopolitics and Butler’s understanding of precarity will be further discussed and applied to the current refugee crisis in Europe in the chapter on the photograph of Alan Kurdi.

Butler therefore emphasizes the primacy of the material and social conditions that constitute the body, which she warns must not be forgotten or denied in any formulation of, or claim to autonomy, as they exist from the start and prior to individuation. The argument that this fundamental relationality between bodies is unalterable and must be recognized as such is expressed in the latter half of the previously mentioned statement. She clarifies that the shared human condition of vulnerability identified certainly can be argued with, however she believes this is a foolish and dangerous position, maintaining that any exploitation of the primary tie or connection between bodies will always constitute an act of violence.⁹ Butler contends that our inherent relationality to an Other is not merely “a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, but [is] an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence.”¹⁰ Thus, she suggests that the body’s condition of vulnerability in relation to all others is a predetermined and perpetual state, and the recognition of this fact should serve as the basis for political action, while the denial of it results in the commission of violence against an Other.

Butler additionally observes that the condition of primary vulnerability is differentially distributed across the globe. She writes, “[c]ertain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the

⁸ Michel Foucault, “Right of Death and Power over Life,” in *Biopolitics: a reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013): 61-62.

⁹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 26-27, 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as “grievable.”¹¹ Her primary example for demonstrating the constructed difference between human lives is comparing how the deaths of those in the American military are mourned and how the deaths of Arab individuals are easily rationalized in the reporting of the conflicts in the Middle East. Butler suggests that such lives that are not commemorated or barely mentioned have somehow fallen outside of the predominant understanding of humanity, since human lives are publically grieved when lost. In asking such questions as, “[h]ow do our cultural frames for thinking the human set limits on the kinds of losses we can avow as loss? After all, if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?” Butler is ultimately concerned with the issue of what is represented as real or unreal, which lives are admitted to exist or not exist, and what the correlation might be between derealization and violence.¹² She notes the distinction between the two separate arguments of claiming that the derealization of particular lives as human makes violence against those lives possible, and asserting that the very derealization of such lives constitutes an act of violence. Butler therefore emphasizes that what is required is not simply the inclusion of those lives currently excluded in the definition of humanity, but an “insurrection at the level of ontology,” referring to a critical reassessment and replacement of the established ontology that exiled certain lives from a shared humanity by denying the grievability of their deaths.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 32.

¹² Ibid., 32-33.

¹³ Ibid., 34.

In the final chapter of the book, entitled “Precarious Life,” Butler begins to draw together the significance of these initial arguments regarding the common human condition of primary vulnerability, the predetermined and fundamental relationality between all bodies, the differentiated ways in which vulnerability is distributed across the globe, and the resultant effects on the determination of various lives as publically grievable or not grievable. She does so through the introduction of Emmanuel Levinas’ conception of the face and the examination of how an Other makes a claim upon us. According to Butler’s reading of Levinas, the face is the “vocalization of agony that is not yet language or no longer language, the one by which we are wakened to the precariousness of the Other’s life,” and is thus the means by which an Other makes an ethical demand of us.¹⁴ The Levinasian face does not strictly refer to a physical human face, but to a form of address and communication between various lives, and more specifically to the moral appeal an image of suffering makes on those viewing it. The example provided to illustrate this proposition is that of women standing in line at the Lubyanka to hear any news of their family members from the Moscow prison. In this instance, the human back is identified as the face, in Levinas and Butler’s sense of the word, and not simply because the women are described as turned away from the viewer so that their own faces are not visible. Butler explains that it is the human back that expresses the agony and suffering of the women waiting in line, as demonstrated in their tendency to crane their necks and raise their shoulder blades, which appear to cry, sob, and scream. The Levinasian face, therefore, must neither be the face of an individual, nor must it communicate solely through language and words in order to make an ethical demand on the Other and to convey the precariousness of its life, which makes this

¹⁴ Ibid., 139.

dissertation's selection of photographs of pain an appropriate means for developing and concretizing the theoretical issues raised thus far.¹⁵

However Butler does not state that the face is entirely emblematic of the vocalization of human suffering. She borrows from Levinas and argues instead that “the face does not represent anything, in the sense that it fails to capture and deliver that to which it refers.”¹⁶ The Levinasian face refers to the humanity of the subject and its vulnerability, yet it must fail to fully depict the human, understood as “that which limits the success of any representational practice.”¹⁷ An image of human suffering must necessarily be an insufficient sign, and it must furthermore demonstrate the inability to capture and convey the humanity of its subject. Something of the human must always escape any attempt of direct and complete representation. Thus, according to Levinas and Butler, this disjunction between what the face refers to and the impossible representation of the human affirms the very humanity of the face.¹⁸ This crucial break between what is represented in a photograph and what cannot be captured makes possible the readings of the three images addressed in this project.

The presented conceptualization of the Levinasian face directs Butler's questions regarding the photographs circulated in the media depicting the actions and consequences of the American military conflicts in the Middle East. She asks if the face, as it appears in such images, is “humanizing in each and every instance? And if it is humanizing in some instances, in what form does this humanization occur, and is there also a dehumanization

¹⁵ Ibid., 132-133.

¹⁶ Ibid., 144.

¹⁷ Ibid., 144.

¹⁸ Ibid., 144.

performed in and through the face?”¹⁹ The paradox of the Levinasian face that fails to represent what it refers to becomes the deciding factor in the evaluation of a photograph of suffering and vulnerability as either humanizing or dehumanizing. Butler therefore emphasizes the significance of considering the various potential reasons and narrative functions for the mobilization of certain images, and what alternative photographs are subsequently disregarded and derealized.²⁰ One prominent example from the contemporary American context is the images from the Abu Graib prison, which clearly demonstrate the exclusion of the lives of Arab prisoners and assert the supremacy of American lives, since the torture and violence perpetrated against the racialized prisoner is perceived as necessary for the latter’s security.

The practice of denying the grieveability of certain lives, and their subsequent exclusion from fully counting as human is expressed through an expanded notion of exile that encompasses varying manifestations of the condition, from the more evident examples of refugee and migrant children in Europe to the experiences of black American citizens prior to the civil rights movement in the United States. The reason for reintroducing the concept of exile in response to Butler’s work on grieveability, precarity, and interrelationality is the increasing scale of global mobility and the nature of twenty-first century migrancy. Edward Said’s essay “Reflections on Exile” serves as an important initial source for beginning to formulate an understanding of modern exile and its relevance to this project. For example, his characterization of the contemporary period, “with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers,” as “the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration”

¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

²⁰ Ibid., 143.

emphasizes the applicability of the term to discussions of the exclusion of lives from humanity.²¹ In the brief essay, Said emphasizes the “truly horrendous” aspects of the modern experiences of exile that are often neglected in literary and religious understandings of the condition as aesthetically and humanistically desirable.²² He writes, “exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; ...it is produced by human beings for other human beings; ...like death but without death’s ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography.”²³ In addition, Said recognizes the positive influence of cultural works produced by exiled individuals for their dispersed communities, noting that “exiled poets and writers lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity –to deny an identity to people.”²⁴ In both instances, Said acknowledges the constructed nature of exile and the resultant violence of the condition. For example, he notes that exile can be legislated, as in created by human beings through formal and legal institutions, thus revealing its fundamentally historical nature. He also acknowledges the violence of living in exile as being alienated and torn from what is familiar, refused an identity or rejected from a community, and consequently denied human dignity. According to Said, the condition of exile therefore encompasses the modern political status of being either a refugee or without citizenship, and the experience of alienation that is felt individually, both of which are depicted in the photographs that are the focus of the later chapters.

Hannah Arendt’s writing on the political dimensions of exile provides an appropriate introduction to the more formal and legal issues surrounding citizenship

²¹ Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 174.

²² *Ibid.*, 173-174.

²³ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

raised by the photographs examined in this project. The main arguments of her brief essay “‘The Rights of Man’: What Are They?” and her larger work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* are that citizenship is a fundamental human right in the post-World War One context and the existing global situation. She first establishes that the outbreak of the First World War in Europe was a calamitous moment from which the Continent has not yet recovered, stating that “[t]he first explosion seems to have touched off a chain reaction in which we have been caught ever since and which nobody seems to be able to stop.”²⁵ Two significant consequences of the war include the “shatter[ing of] the façade of Europe’s political system to lay bare its hidden frame” and the creation of an unprecedented degree of national minority groups and stateless individuals.²⁶ The political framework exposed by the events of the First World War refers to the Westphalian system of sovereign nation-states. Arendt is critical of the exclusionary assumptions on which the modern nation-state is based, such as the shared language, religion, culture, history, and ethnicity of a people. She characterizes the development of the nation-state, as “the transformation of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation,” emphasizing that, by the twentieth century, “the nation had conquered the state, nation interest had priority over law.”²⁷ Thus, Arendt suggests that, prior to the emergence of the Westphalian nation-state, the two composite institutions were separate from one another. She defines the role of the state as “the protection of all inhabitants in its territory no matter what their nationality, and [it] was supposed to act as

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company: 1958), 267.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 267.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

a supreme legal institution.”²⁸ The nation, however, is founded on the exclusionary notion of a group of people with a common origin, and the interests of such groups privileged with a “national consciousness” interfere with the basic legal functions of the state.²⁹ Finally, Arendt notes that, “the precarious balance between nation and state, between national interest and legal institutions broke down.”³⁰

An additional consequence of the usurpation of the legal institution of the state by the inherently exclusionary notion of the nation for the stateless is that they become rightless individuals, since “from [the time of the French Revolution] on human rights were protected and enforced only as national rights.”³¹ Arendt identifies the loss of a home and of government protection as defining the circumstances of the rightless, thus proposing that to be stateless is to be rightless, and that to be “thrown out” of a nation-state is to be “thrown out of the family of nations altogether.”³² She also states that, “[n]ot only did loss of national rights in all instances entail the loss of human rights, but the restoration of the latter, as the recent example of the State of Israel proves, has been achieved so far only through the establishment of the former.”³³ As such Arendt suggests that, in order for human rights to regain their meaningfulness in the contemporary world, they must be reconceptualised to reflect the modern crisis of statelessness. She identifies “the right of every human being to membership in a political community” as the basic and primary human right that “transcends [a person’s] various rights as a citizen,” as they

²⁸ Ibid., 230.

²⁹ Ibid., 230.

³⁰ Ibid., 275.

³¹ Ibid., 230.

³² Ibid., 293-294.

³³ Hannah Arendt, “‘The Rights of Man’: What Are They?” *Modern Review* 3, no. 1 (1949): 31.

were declared in the eighteenth century.³⁴ Arendt's examination of rightlessness remains relevant to Said's understanding of exile due to her elaboration of the historical roots of the status of the stateless and the refugee in the development of the modern nation-state. Her writing and arguments further suggest that the contemporary refugee crisis is not solely the result of inadequate government and institutional responses to the particular situation of "Europe's boat people," but that it is directly connected with the structure of the nation-state itself.

Alternatively, Eli Clare provides a different perspective on the condition of exile, focusing instead on the alienation of the condition in the book *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* through the image of the mountain detailed in the first chapter. Clare refers to exile as a metaphor to describe experiences of oppression from an intersectional approach, however his account remains useful in beginning to understand how the violence of exile might be felt individually. The metaphoric mountain refers to the upward struggle towards "that phantom called normality," as defined by those who placed themselves at the summit and to the disadvantage of anyone else who fails to meet every specified standard.³⁵ He writes:

We hear from the summit that the world is grand from up there... we decide to climb... [but] the climbing turns out to be unimaginably difficult. We are afraid; every time we look ahead we can find nothing remotely familiar or comfortable... And it's goddam lonely up there on the mountain...[we] decide to continue climbing only to have the very people who told us how wonderful life is at the summit booby-trap the trail... Maybe we get to the summit, but probably not. And the price we pay is huge.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., 34, 36.

³⁵ Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 1.

³⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

The ultimate cost of starting up the mountain and the accompanying feelings of unfamiliarity and alienation are the sense of living in exile. The mountain itself is Clare's metaphor for the various systems of oppression that support the particular and uniform group at the top, including patriarchy, capitalism, white supremacy, and ableism. Exile is felt individually and is shaped by a person's location on the mountain, determined by the particular convergence of the various systems of oppression on or in a single body.

Clare's visualization of living in exile on the mountain emphasizes the violence of alienation, and is therefore comparable to Said's aforementioned description of the horrendous effects of modern exile, which is primarily manifested in the political status of the refugee or the stateless individual. Said makes note of the involuntary aspect of exile in writing of how individuals are torn from what is familiar, and of how it is a condition legislated by one group and imposed onto another. Clare's metaphoric mountain illustrates instead a less coercive and seemingly more benign force that encourages individuals to abandon what is familiar and to voluntarily struggle towards the summit, while simultaneously making it increasingly difficult to do so. Nonetheless, both scholars similarly demonstrate the deliberate production of exile and the inherent violence of the condition. Said's attention to the modern political instances of exile and Clare's focus on experiences of oppression further show that individuals must live with such violent circumstances, which do not always result in death, as was the case for Alan Kurdi.

In summation, the discussed writings of Said, Arendt, and Clare elaborate on the wider context of twenty-first century migrancy and the violence of exile in which the selected photographs of the ensuing case studies exist. Said's remarks highlight the two

significant aspects of the condition of exile as a political status and as the sense of being separated from what is familiar. Arendt elaborates on the circumstances of the refugee and the stateless individual, and the historical development of such modern manifestations of exile from the exclusionary structure of the Westphalian nation-state. Clare provides one potential way in which exile might be felt individually in using the concept as a metaphor for experiences of oppression, as both cases involve a sense of alienation. In the following chapters, each theorist will be applied to an image in order to expand on their interpretations of exile and to concretize the discussion presented thus far.

First, however, the particular methodology adopted for reading the selected photographs as a text must be formulated. As such, the works of Susan Sontag, Ariella Azoulay, Roland Barthes, Nancy Tuana, and Jacques Ranciere provide the necessary foundation for the approach of the following analyses of the images of Emmett Till, Alan Kurdi, and the Lampedusa child. The ultimate purpose of the case studies remains guided by the questions Butler raises regarding when and how photographs either recognize or deny the grievability, and thus humanity, of certain lives in reading how experiences of exile and suffering are represented to the spectator of an image.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag focuses explicitly on war photography and the modern role of photojournalists in delivering shocking images of pain and suffering to those without personal or direct experiences with war, and who rely on the media instead. She traces the development of the current importance and authority placed on the photograph, particularly the one depicting death, noting that, “[t]he ultra-familiar, ultra-celebrated image –of agony, of ruin –is an unavoidable feature of our camera-

mediated knowledge of war.”³⁷ In contrast with the verbal or written accounts that were the primary means of communication in the past, photography appears to combine the two oppositional features of being an objective record and a personal testimony at once. An individual must have been present to witness the event, however it is the camera, as a machine, that ultimately captures the scene and inscribes it as a photograph. The image is therefore “both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality.”³⁸

Sontag’s position on the duality of the image as simultaneously objective and personal is a precarious one. She is careful not to overstate the camera’s supposed ability to record an event precisely as it occurs, though she also maintains that photographs are a form of the truth. This interpretation is further demonstrated in a later chapter when Sontag comments on Francisco Goya’s *The Disasters of War*. She notes that the purpose of several of the captions that accompany the collection of prints is to confirm and assure the viewers of the veracity of the scenes depicted. Such guarantees are not necessary in the case of photography, because “[o]f course the photographer saw [what is photographed]. And unless there’s been some tampering or misrepresenting, [the image] is the truth.”³⁹ However, Sontag also recognizes the limitations of the photograph as an uncomplicated truth-telling medium, stating in the next paragraph, “[i]t is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude.”⁴⁰ She therefore balances the two oppositional features of photography as a mechanical means of

³⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 18-24.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

capturing a moment that ultimately requires an individual to direct, time, and frame the camera's gaze, without giving privilege to or prioritizing one aspect over the other.

Given this interpretation of the photograph, Sontag is able to remain critical of images of pain and the extent to which they can effect change, demonstrating a concern with understanding the difference between protesting against human suffering and merely acknowledging its reprehensible perpetration.⁴¹ According to Sontag, photography claims to represent reality exactly as it took place, meaning its primary purpose is to depict an event as it occurred before the camera, as opposed to evoking a particular response, which is why a photograph can also be a form of evidence. However, within the context of modern consumerist society and its reliance on the proliferation and manipulation of images, it cannot be assumed that evidence of atrocities will naturally inspire a favourable and productive response from the viewers of the photograph. Sontag further writes, "morally concerned photographers and ideologues of photography have become increasingly concerned with the issues of exploitation of sentiment (pity, compassion, indignation) in war photography and of rote ways of provoking feeling."⁴² As such, the context in which images of pain and suffering appear is an additional limitation on the supposed neutrality of the camera, even when the photograph manages to encourage an empathetic response from the viewer. Sontag ultimately recognizes that "photographs are a species of alchemy, for all that they are prized as a transparent account of reality," further emphasizing the dependency of images on both the photographer's choices and the circumstances of its mobilization.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 40.

⁴² Ibid., 47, 79-80.

⁴³ Ibid., 81.

For Sontag, however, the narrative framework in which war photographs appear and are circulated have a greater impact on the reception and potential significance of an image, and not the photograph itself and the photographer's decisions regarding its composition and framing. She states that, "[photographs] are not much help if the task is to make us understand. Narratives make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us."⁴⁴ The image alone therefore cannot provoke the comprehension necessary for sufficient protest against human suffering, and appears empty instead, requiring an accompanying narrative to convey the complex historical, political, social, economic, or other similarly deep-rooted reasons for the pain depicted. Sontag limits the effectiveness of photography to providing "only an initial spark" of interest or awareness that cannot coerce the viewers "[t]o set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering and may –in ways we might prefer not to imagine –be linked to their suffering as the wealth of some may imply the destruction of others."⁴⁵ As such, Sontag does not overstate the potential communicative or transformative power of the image, maintaining throughout the book that its primary role is in mediating an audience's knowledge of war and catastrophe, and not crafting a sense of responsibility and duty towards the subjects of the photographs. She concludes, "[n]either is the photograph supposed to repair our ignorance about the history and causes of the suffering it picks out and frames. Such images cannot be more than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 102-103.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 117.

Azoulay adopts a very different position on the image and presents a contrasting interpretation of its communicative capabilities in her theorization of the citizenry of photography. Her particular conceptualization of photography extends beyond the visual content captured and reproduced by a camera to include the picture-taking moment in its entirety, which she refers to as the photographic event. The image is therefore the product of an encounter between the multiple protagonists of the photographic event, including the photographer, the photographed, the camera, and the spectator. Azoulay does not limit her discussion and examination of photography to distinguishing between what is inside or outside the camera's scope and the photograph's frame. She argues instead that, when viewing images of disaster and human suffering, such a framework promotes an acceptance of the fate of others as a distinct political trait of theirs, and obscures the fact that the subject and spectator of the photograph are governed alongside one another.⁴⁷ Thus, Azoulay maintains that this interpretation of photography, as an event that involves several actors, all of which constitute the citizenry of photography, allows her to depart from the commonly held assumption of the photograph as an unchanging and fixed product of the individual photographer's perspective, and to propose instead that "a photograph does not possess a single sovereign, stable point of view."⁴⁸

Azoulay emphasizes the role of the spectator in photography significantly more than Sontag does in her own work. She formulates an ethics of the spectator that is fundamentally based on the notion of the conquest of the world as a picture, which must be elaborated on first. Azoulay claims that the conquest of the world as a picture began

⁴⁷ Ariella Azoulay, "What is a photograph? What is photography?" *Philosophy of Photography* 1 (2010): 11, accessed January 11, 2016, doi: 10.1386/pop.1.1.9/7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

shortly after the invention of the camera and the appearance of the photograph. She characterizes this phenomenon by the fact that “every citizen could see –through photographs, and thus through the eyes of others –more than they could see by herself.”⁴⁹ The general lack of restrictions on the use of photography in public spaces, the liability of every person to be photographed, and their subsequent implication in the conquest of the world as a picture renders them members of the photographic event, or the citizenry of photography. Azoulay notes that, since each individual participates in both the conquered world as a picture and the means of conquest as photographers or spectators, the process is a continual and unfinished one, thus preventing the complete reduction of the world to a picture. She writes, “the logic of photography exceeds the singular act of photography and is woven into the net of a plurality of people,” emphasizing the impossibility of a sovereign interpretation of an image.⁵⁰ Instead of illustrating the single, intended perspective of the photographer that remains unaltered by its circulation and reception, Azoulay suggests the photograph is more accurately defined by an agreement she refers to as the civil contract of photography. This contract permits the logic of photography, based on the citizenry of photography and the participation of every person in the conquest of the world as a picture, to supersede existing social relations. However, the agreement also allows for resistance against the conquest of the world, since each individual represents a challenge to photography’s total control. The civil contract of photography therefore initiates a responsibility to prevent the finalization of the conquest, which forms part of the basis of Azoulay’s ethics of the spectator.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ariella Azoulay, “The Ethic of the Spectator: The Citizenry of Photography,” *Afterimage* 33 no. 2 (Sept/Oct 2005): 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

The spectator's task is essentially to reconstruct the context in which a photograph was taken. Azoulay recognizes, much like Sontag, the duality of the photograph as both recording what had taken place before the camera lens and as culturally dependent on the protagonists of the photographic event. However she clarifies this dualism differently from Sontag, and stresses instead the partiality of what is captured by the photographer, instead of the limitations of an image to communicate without an accompanying narrative. Azoulay writes of what is depicted in an image that, "*what was indeed existed, but not necessarily in this way, and it has not necessarily ended.*"⁵² Thus, the image only reveals a moment out of reality, and does not show all that occurred and continues to occur. The spectator is responsible for reconstructing what had been before the camera lens from what is clearly visible in the resultant photograph, and from what is not visible or manifest, though equally present and likely to have been included.⁵³

Barthes' second half of *Mythologies*, provides the beginnings for enacting the responsibility and obligations of the spectator that Azoulay proposes, and for navigating the narrative frameworks that Sontag identifies as necessary for the photograph to effectively communicate. He presents the notion of myth as a semiological system of communication in which images become a form of writing once they acquire meaning and which can therefore be read as texts. He identifies the three elements of the mythological system as the form, the concept, and the signification. The form refers to the empty sign or symbol, which is filled with the concept or a particular meaning, resulting in the signification as the message communicated in an image. Barthes notes the correlation between the three terms allows myths to "[make] us understand something

⁵² Ibid., 43.

⁵³ Ibid., 43.

and [impose] it on us.”⁵⁴ The first way myth accomplishes this is by emptying the form of its initial meaning. According to Barthes, myth is a second order semiological system, stemming directly from the system of language, which is similarly structured. As such, language is also composed of three terms, those being the signifier, the signified, and the sign, the last of which becomes the first term in the system of myth once abstracted and impoverished of meaning.⁵⁵ The concept, alternatively, is rooted in a certain situation and context, is fundamentally motivated by specific intentions, and is characteristically appropriated for a purpose. It is therefore not invested with reality, but with a particular knowledge or version of reality instead. Additionally, Barthes emphasizes that the concept does not function to hide or mask the initial meaning of the form, but that myth works primarily to distort, and the signification is the result of the association of the first two terms.⁵⁶

The signification consequently represents the myth itself, and the relation between the form and the concept that it is based on is one of deformation and distortion. As a means of communication, or a type of speech, myth is defined by its intention and motivation. Barthes observes that the intention of a particular message is often “somehow frozen, purified, eternalized, *made absent* by [its] literal sense,” thus allowing the message to be read as both a notification and simple statement of fact “without any trace of the history which has caused it.”⁵⁷ He further asserts that the myth is never random or arbitrary, but always motivated and centered on the analogy or equivalence between the mythological form and the meaning. Barthes notes that a motivated form is fundamental

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1972), 107-115.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 113-117.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 117-120.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 121-124.

to the duplicity of the myth's signification, and that an important aspect of the motivation is its fragmentary nature. For instance, the possible analogies between the form, the meaning, and the concept are always selected and partial, as opposed to natural, complete, and self-evident.⁵⁸ Thus, Barthes presents myth as a second order semiological system based on the intentional, motivated, and fragmentary interplay between the three composite terms of the form, the concept, and the signification.

This particular conceptualization of mythologies allows Barthes to state “myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion.”⁵⁹ He therefore identifies the principle of myth as naturalizing history, or transforming history into nature, thus permitting what is communicated by mythical speech to be “immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason.”⁶⁰ Barthes ultimately argues that myth functions to make what is contingent and historical appear natural and, by extension, unnecessary to explain or better understand. The question that directs the following reading of the selected photographs is fundamentally informed by Barthes' notion of mythologies, as this dissertation begins with the claim that mythical speech naturalizes historical realities and experiences. However Barthes' argument must be clarified and elaborated on in order to specify the type of analysis of this project seeks to accomplish of the various images of exile.

Barthes briefly notes the instability, dynamism, and continually changing nature of myth when he mentions the lack of “fixity in mythical concepts,” and the “constantly

⁵⁸ Ibid., 124-125.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 128.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 128.

moving turnstile,” on which the signification is constituted.⁶¹ When interpreting myth, Barthes maintains that he must momentarily interrupt such motions and “apply to myth a static method of deciphering,” thus passing “from the state of the reader to that of mythologist.”⁶² In doing so, however, Barthes does not sufficiently address the inherent indeterminacy of mythologies and the transformative interrelations between the form, the concept, and the signification. In addition to the lack of fixity and finality in photography that Azoulay previously argued for, the concept of viscous porosity is borrowed from Tuana’s chapter, “Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina,” to provide a means of understanding the fluctuations of the system of myths and to discuss the divide between what is identified as natural and what is identified as historical or cultural from a different perspective.

Tuana proposes the concept of viscous porosity as a methodology for better understanding and grasping the complexity of events, phenomena, and realities, like that of Hurricane Katrina and the experience of the city of New Orleans. According to Tuana, both the idea of viscous porosity and the case of Katrina illustrate the trouble with attempting to strictly differentiate between what is natural and what is cultural, or social. She writes, “[t]hese distinctions ...are metaphysically problematic, for there are important migrations between and across these divides that can be occluded by efforts to posit a dualism.”⁶³ Tuana therefore strongly advocates for the adoption of an “interactionist ontology,” and a shift in focus to “the in-between of the complex

⁶¹ Ibid., 119, 121.

⁶² Ibid., 122.

⁶³ Nancy Tuana, “Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina,” in *Material Feminisms*, eds. S. Alaimo and S. Hekman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 202.

interrelations from which phenomena emerge.”⁶⁴ Ultimately she argues that such an approach to the study of events, phenomena, and realities demonstrates they cannot be defined as solely natural, or solely cultural, but must be understood as both, lying somewhere in-between nature and culture.

The first concept that introduces the discussion surrounding what is natural and what is cultural is that of an interactionist ontology, which “*rematerializes the social and takes seriously the agency of the natural.*”⁶⁵ Already Tuana is challenging the notion that the social is entirely constructed and the natural is static and pre-determined, thus beginning to demonstrate how difficult it is to strictly delineate the two. She presents next the metaphor of viscous porosity, whose function is to help illuminate what is involved in an interactionist ontology. She breaks down the two parts of the term, stating that viscosity refers to an intermediate state of matter that is neither fluid nor solid, and that also retains a sense of resistance and opposition to changing form. Tuana chooses porosity in order “to undermine the notion that distinctions... signify a natural or unchanging boundary, a natural kind.”⁶⁶ Tuana thus argues against a reliance on the dichotomous theoretical frameworks of realism and social constructivism, neither of which she states is sufficient for feminist work. Realism is based on the acceptance of what exists as natural, or “*prior to and independent of human interactions,*” whereas social constructivism fundamentally challenges this position and maintains that phenomena and realities are not independent of human interaction, or society, but emerge directly from them.⁶⁷ The framework that Tuana proposes is less concerned with studying

⁶⁴ Ibid., 188-189.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 188.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 188, 193-194.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 190-191.

events and realities as either strictly natural or cultural and social phenomena, embracing instead the idea of viscous porosity. An approach founded on an interactionist ontology focuses on “the process of becoming in which unity is dynamic and always interactive and agency is diffusely enacted in complex networks of relations,” thus accepting “divisions [as] both permeable and shifting, while at the same time deeply entrenched in bodies and practices.”⁶⁸

Tuana does not, however, advocate for the complete abandonment of distinctions, such as the one between nature and culture, without exception. For example, she notes that:

[a]dequate distinctions can be made, even distinctions between “nature” and “culture,” but they are made for a particular purpose and at a particular time. In other words, we do not simply “read” such distinctions from nature, *but take epistemic responsibility for the distinctions we employ.*⁶⁹

What is important for Tuana, therefore, is not the outright destruction of all barriers and differentiations, but to recognize that they are not natural and pre-determined aspects of the world that cannot or should not be more closely examined, questioned, challenged, modified, or fundamentally changed if necessary. She cautions against the arguments, narratives, and presentations of phenomena such as Katrina, that insist on the natural and almost inevitable course of events that are difficult to predict and adequately prevent.

Tuana notes that an interactionist framework demonstrates “the various institutions and motives that have a stake in the production and maintenance of ignorance” are a crucial example of how the distinction between nature and culture is created at a particular

⁶⁸ Ibid., 188-189.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 192.

moment and for a particular purpose.⁷⁰ As such, epistemic responsibility necessitates that the context of an experience, the reasons for the characterization of what is natural or what is cultural, and the potential interests involved are all carefully considered and appropriately examined. In short, Tuana insists that an increased emphasis must be placed on what is “*well-known, but ignored or rationalized.*”⁷¹

Barthes’ understanding of myth as a semiological system and Tuana’s metaphor of viscous porosity fundamentally guide the approach of the ensuing examination of the images of Emmett Till, Alan Kurdi, and the Lampedusa child. Barthes’ three-part framework of mythologies provides a helpful structure for beginning to read the photographs as a text, while Tuana’s notion of the viscous porosity of events, phenomena, and realities serves as an important reminder that neither the image, the message it communicates, or the interpretations presented are fixed. In addition, both scholars demonstrate a common interest in critically engaging with the fabrication of certain experiences and knowledges as natural, instead of as historical or cultural. Thus, Butler’s introductory concerns can be framed in Barthes’ and Tuana’s terms as how the precarity of certain lives are portrayed through photographs, what of the circumstances of the depicted bodies’ vulnerability are rationalized as natural and inevitable, and what aspects of the wider context are ignored as cultural and fabricated, for the purpose of determining what lives are recognized as publically grievable and subsequently human. In doing so, however, the project follows Azoulay’s emphasis on the role of the spectator of photography, and refers to Ranciere’s understanding of politics and aesthetics, and his theorization of the emancipated spectator in particular.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 203.

⁷¹ Ibid., 204.

Ranciere's conceptualization of politics and aesthetics begins with his identification of a break in the predominant regime of art, which changed from one based on representation, or *mimesis*, to an aesthetic one. The representative regime is founded on the assumed natural and evident concordance between sense and sense. Ranciere elaborates in reference to the classical stage and the plays of Moliere and Voltaire, which demonstrate a belief in the theatre as a site that offers a magnified reflection of the vices and virtues of a society through fiction. The revelation of the true nature of human beings presented by classical plays was expected to result in a targeted change in the minds of the audience members, and ultimately to effect a change in their behaviour outside of the theatre. Ranciere's two uses of sense refer to the intellectual recognition of what takes place on the stage, and the appropriate or desired emotional response to the social issues presented in the play. This mimetic regime therefore assumes that the presentation of a problem to an audience through art will automatically ensure the audience's adoption of the artist's concerns and inspire change. Ranciere recognizes that this logic continues to manifest itself in contemporary expectations of politically effective art in the lingering belief that "the photography of some atrocity will mobilize us against injustice."⁷² Alternatively, the aesthetic regime of art is based instead on the collapse of such an assumption of how the spectator receives what the artist presents. According to Ranciere, the aesthetic change in the regime of art signals the break in the continuity between representation and its ethical efficacy that characterized the mimetic regime. The efficacy of the aesthetic regime is therefore "a paradoxical kind of efficacy that is produced by the very rupturing of any determinate link between cause and effect."⁷³ It is a regime

⁷² Jacques Ranciere, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011), 60-61.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 63.

characterized by a radical loss of a specified or intended destination, and is instead founded on disruption and dissensus.⁷⁴

Within Ranciere's notion of the aesthetic shift in the regime of art, the spectator assumes a newly emancipated role that is not one of being informed by the artist's representation of the ills of society, but is related to the dissensual nature of the aesthetic regime. He defines dissensus as "a conflict between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds," those being intellectual recognition and appropriate emotion.⁷⁵ This inherent dissonance of the aesthetic regime permits for the constant challenging and reconfiguration of established modes of perception and signification. Ranciere notes that, "dissensus brings back into play both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done, and the distribution of those who are capable of perceiving, thinking and altering the coordinates of the shared world."⁷⁶ Similar to Azoulay's previously discussed understanding of the spectator as a member of the citizenry of photography, Ranciere emphasizes that every individual participates and acts as a spectator in the aesthetic regime of art, which constitutes their emancipation. He explains that the emancipation of the spectator does not rely on the transformation of the role from a passive one to an active one, but on the blurring of these very distinctions. Since the position of the spectator is every individuals' normal situation, a privileged perspective or starting point does not exist. Ranciere writes, "[w]e... learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dream."⁷⁷ As such, he describes the role of the spectator as an interpreter translating what she views

⁷⁴ Ibid., 64, 70-73.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 58.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 48-49.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 17, 19.

according to her own experiences, and narrating the resultant story to others, establishing an emancipated community.⁷⁸

Ranciere's more general conceptualizations regarding politics and aesthetics are comparable to Azoulay's notion of the citizenry of photography and the participation of several protagonists in the photographic event. Both theorists argue for the possibility of any individual to act as a spectator and the associated transformative potential of the role. Ranciere's understanding of dissensus and its constant disruption of the existing means of perception allows for the emancipation of the spectator from the rigid framework of the mimetic regime that assumes a direct link between what the artist aims to inform the viewer of, and the viewer's subsequent change in behaviour or understanding. The lack of finality or fixity in the aesthetic regime of art is therefore much like Azoulay's unfinished conquest of the world as a picture. According to both interpretations, the spectator represents a constant challenge to the establishment of a single, unitary perspective of the social world, and the very prevention of the control of the image is the task and obligation of the spectator. Ranciere and Azoulay's work therefore fundamentally informs the position of this project and the ensuing readings of the selected photographs.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 22.

On August 28, 1955, fourteen year old Emmett Till was taken from his uncle's house in Money, Mississippi and was brutally beaten and killed for whistling at Mrs. Carolyn Bryant a few days earlier. The murder of the young African American was quickly captured and shared through the photographs taken by *Jet* magazine at the open-casket funeral his mother, Mamie Till Bradley, insisted on, which plainly showed the disfigurement of his face from both the lynching and the three days his body spent in the Tallahatchie River. Bradley's refusal to allow her son to be hastily buried in Mississippi, or to permit his corpse to be touched up prior to the public funeral held in Chicago, illustrate her determination to "let the people see what I've seen," as she stated in one documentary.⁷⁹ The importance she placed on witnessing what had been done to her young son, and on making his body visible to others reflects her desire to share and communicate her and her son's experiences with a wider community that can either relate to and identify with their suffering or be shocked and made aware of the violent reality of white supremacy. *Jet* magazine's photo-essay on the murder of Emmett Till, which included the image of his mutilated and unrecognizable face that is specifically under discussion in this chapter, had a noticeable impact on the American public and the progression of the civil rights movement, as "[he] showed the world exactly what white supremacy looked like."⁸⁰ For instance, some scholars have identified the circulation of the photograph in news publications, and the subsequent acquittal of the two men charged with the crime, as closely related to the mobilization of both black and white Americans for the former's demands for desegregation, civil rights, and meaningful inclusion in the

⁷⁹ Ashraf Rushdy, 72; "The Murder of Emmett Till –Documentary in HD," Youtube video, posted by Little Dread, May 4, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-X4is9jMYk>

⁸⁰ Rushdy, "The Murder of Emmett Till," 72.

nation-state's citizenry.⁸¹ Bradley also notes the influence of the images and the type of reaction they engendered, stating that "when people saw what had happened to my son, men stood up who had never stood up before, people became vocal who had never vocalized before. Emmett's death was the opening of the civil rights movement."⁸² Bradley's observation of the role of the public witnessing of her son's corpse in the mobilization of American citizens for the civil rights movement and the accompanying structural changes in the United States serve as a primary reason for beginning with Till's photograph in discussing images of pain as a means of effective communication and the ability of the spectator to recognize her fundamental connection to an Other's suffering.

In addressing the communicative potential of a photograph depicting an Other's pain, the relationship between the photographic subject and the viewer must first be understood. Azoulay characterizes this relationship as resembling one between citizens in her elaboration on the concept of the citizenry of photography that was introduced in the preceding chapter. She suggests that, once the notion of citizenship is thought of beyond denoting a formal legal status bound to the structure of the nation-state, it is similar to the relationship among the protagonists of the photographic event. Part of Azoulay's claim is based on her definition of citizenship, which principally represents "a partnership of governed persons taking up their duty as citizens and utilizing their position for one another, rather than for a sovereign."⁸³ Also necessary for understanding Azoulay's argument is the fundamental connection she establishes between the figure of the citizen and the act of presenting a grievance. She identifies the citizen as a "political addresser...

⁸¹ Heather Pool, "Mourning Emmett Till," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 11 no. 3 (2015): 415-417.

⁸² "The Murder of Emmett Till."

⁸³ Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 85, 104.

that voices grievances,” emphasizing this as “his essence, his function.”⁸⁴ However, the lack of citizenship, in its formal legalistic sense, constitutes a serious obstacle for the recognition of the suffering of non-citizens as a political issue, and thus impairs their ability to voice a grievance to those either responsible for their suffering or capable of mitigating its effects.⁸⁵ According to Azoulay, the photograph is an alternative means through which individuals can present a grievance, whether they are governed as citizens or non-citizens, and make a claim on the spectator. The task of the citizen of the photographic event is therefore to acknowledge the grievance being voiced through the image and to act in solidarity with her fellow human, instead of with the ‘common sense’ understandings of the sovereign nation-state she formally belongs to.

As such, a significant element of the questions directing the analysis of the selected photographs that are the focus of this dissertation is the voicing of a grievance, and the spectator’s ability to recognize the claim of an Other. This concern with the photographic subject’s presentation of a grievance is comparable with Butler’s previously discussed emphasis on the grievability of life and the related acceptance of an Other’s life as human. Butler’s observation that “no one controls the terms by which one is addressed, at least not in the most fundamental ways” is much like Azoulay’s argument that no member of the citizenry of photography can exert their own perspective on the others.⁸⁶ Neither the photographer, the photographed, the viewer, nor even the camera have complete and uncontested sovereignty over the image and what it communicates. Thus, the grievance or claim made through a photograph of pain and suffering is not always

⁸⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁶ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 139.

presented by the subject, but can also be made by other actors of the photographic event. For instance, the image of Till's body can be interpreted as representing his mother's suffering as much as his own, especially given her role in the visibility of his corpse and the circulation of the photograph. Azoulay's notion of the necessarily incomplete conquest of the world as a picture is also reflected in Butler's work when she addresses the issue of the image, representation, and what she refers to as the sphere of appearance. Butler recognizes that limitations exist that might impede the spectator's engagement with the photograph and circumscribe what can be seen or known of the wider context in which the image was taken. She writes, "it would be a mistake to think that we only need to find the right and true images, and that a certain reality will then be conveyed. The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers."⁸⁷

Both Azoulay and Butler therefore emphasize the photograph's inherent and essential inability to truthfully capture and represent the reality of its subject matter, though Butler places greater importance on this aspect of the image. For Azoulay, the incompleteness of the photograph is primarily the result of the citizenry of photography and their continual and perpetual interaction with the image, which renders a single fixed interpretation impossible. Butler, alternatively, argues that in order for a photograph to represent a human face, in the Levinasian sense, it must be partial and it must fail at entirely capturing a phenomenon or experience of suffering. The incompleteness of the image attests to the humanity and grievability of the life depicted, since the human face is more complex than what could ever be depicted in a photograph. It is therefore the

⁸⁷ Ibid., 146.

inability of an image of pain to perfectly illustrate the experiences of an Other and the resultant challenge it poses to representation that permit the humanization of the subject. In elaborating on this fundamental characteristic of a humanizing photograph, Butler also recognizes that prescribed ways of knowing and seeing what is circulated in the sphere of appearance may impede the viewer's full and critical engagement with an image of suffering.

The crucial questions directing this dissertation and the analyses of each of the selected photographs therefore center on what lives are perceived as grievable, and therefore human, how are experiences of pain and suffering in exile represented, and to what extent does the spectator recognize the grievance of an Other and their fundamental interrelationality. In Emmett Till's case, Bradley's actions and the dissemination of the image under discussion effectively made his life grievable and publically mourned, which went against the intentions of the men who lynched him in the middle of the night and the sheriff's department that attempted to discretely bury him in Mississippi.⁸⁸ As such, the photograph of Till's mutilated body lying in its casket will be considered first in relation to the lynching images of the late 19th to early 20th centuries, and then studied as a photograph of mourning in order to discuss what grievance is being presented to the spectator and within what context. Ranciere's differentiation between the mimetic and aesthetic regimes of art will be elaborated on to examine the extent to which the photograph served as an effective means of communication between the subject and the spectator. Ultimately, the purpose of including Till's image in a project focusing on modern experiences of exile is to demonstrate the condition's operation outside of the

⁸⁸ Pool, "Mourning Emmett Till," 429.

restricted notion of exile as only referring to a lack of citizenship in the legal sense and to emphasize the alienation felt within a community that does not fully or meaningfully accept its members equally. This tension between formal and substantive belonging evident in Till's lynching is necessary to the comparison with the case of Alan Kurdi as represented by the photograph of his corpse on a Turkish beach in the following chapter.

Several scholars relate Emmett Till's death with the history of lynching in the southern United States of the late 19th to early 20th centuries. A primary reason for the establishment of this connection is Bryant and Milam's reason for brutally killing the fourteen year old, which was for reportedly whistling at Mrs. Bryant as he was leaving the Bryant's general store. The threat and fear of interracial sex was a prominent justification or pretext used by white men in the South for the lynching of black men following the abolition of slavery.⁸⁹ However, a more relevant similarity between Emmett Till's murder in 1955 and the recent and lingering history of Southern lynch law for the present work is the use and circulation of images of black American bodies. During the "golden age of lynching," a mob would often conclude the spectacle of hanging, maiming, and burning a black man by posing for a group photograph with the body.⁹⁰ These images became iconic of white supremacy, and were shared across counties either through newspapers, or sold as individual shots, or occasionally turned into postcards. In doing so, the lynching mobs dramatized the social hierarchy in which "[b]lacks were terrorized, white women were vulnerable, and white men were on top, invulnerable and free."⁹¹ The dissemination of the group photographs both communicated

⁸⁹ Ibid., 423-424.

⁹⁰ Rushdy, "The Murder of Emmett Till," 70.

⁹¹ Ibid., 70.

and reaffirmed the standing of each white community across the American South in the period that immediately followed the emancipation of black slaves. By 1955, the meaning of lynching photographs and images of mutilated black bodies was beginning to change, and they were increasingly used in the political struggle for anti-lynching laws, thus becoming symbols for the denunciation of white supremacy instead.⁹² The actual practice of lynching black men, however, was not correspondingly decreasing in the South, but merely becoming less visible and less of a “communal carnival,” as it had previously been.⁹³

It is therefore within this shifting context of the significance and perception of black male bodies that Emmett Till’s photograph was initially circulated by the efforts and actions of his mother. Though the circumstances of Till’s murder were familiar and well known to his family and black communities across the United States, the image itself and the way in which it was shared are very different from the earlier exchange of lynching photographs. This fundamental distinction between the two is predominantly due to Mamie Till Bradley and the choices she made regarding her son from the moment she learned of his kidnapping. Her residence in Chicago, her position as a respectable middle-class mother, and her understanding of the ways of the South influenced her ability and decision to immediately raise awareness of Till’s case, in addition to the public’s perception of, and identification with, her eventual grief.⁹⁴ Bradley’s presentation of her son’s body to those attending the open-casket funeral and the audiences of the media outlets that covered the murder illustrates her rejection of the

⁹² Ibid., 70, 73.

⁹³ Pool, “Mourning Emmett Till,” 424.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 428-430.

usual and expected response of black mothers to privately mourn and accept her loss. Had she not repeatedly insisted on the witnessing of the corpse, “[i]nstead of a public photograph that started one of the largest public outcries in the nation’s history, Emmett’s body could have become the photograph always and forever imprinted on the eyelids of African American women for centuries, babies still being brought as disfigured corpses to their mothers’ eyes.”⁹⁵ As such, though Emmett Till was plainly lynched for whistling at a white woman, and the subsequent photograph of his body was widely circulated as the photographs of earlier victims had been, his mother’s role was crucial in distinguishing his case from previous ones, which ensured the visibility of the violence that led to his death and continued to impact black Americans in 1955.

Till’s image therefore exists within this wider context of lynching photographs and the significantly changing meaning of their use and dissemination prior to the civil rights movement. Bradley’s efforts to promote the visibility and witnessing of her only son’s mutilated body represents a claim against the extreme violence of white supremacy. The image consequently corresponds with the developing use of lynching photographs in support of black Americans’ demands for meaningful inclusion within the United States’ citizen body. However Till’s mutilated body also represents the grievance of his mother as she openly mourns the murder of her only child and invites others to do the same. In the article “Mourning Emmett Till,” Heather Pool elaborates on the role of the image in the development of the civil rights movement in 1955, and argues that the affective impact it had on liberal white Americans in the North was a crucial factor to their recognition of the injustice faced by black citizens and their demands for full citizenship.

⁹⁵ Rebecca Mark, “Mourning Emmett: ‘One Long Expansive Moment,’” *Southern Literary Journal* 40 no. 2 (Spring 2008): 127-128.

As such, she introduces the notion of political mourning, defined as occurring “when political actors mobilize the deaths of average citizens to argue for political change. Mourning provides a moment when citizens can acknowledge or eschew the complex responsibility that resides in collectives.”⁹⁶ The example of Emmett Till’s death represents the effectiveness of such a moment because it clearly illustrated the extreme violence of persistent racism in the South that directly contradicted and challenged the “willful ignorance” of liberal white citizens and their perception of the United States as a society committed to the ideals of justice and democracy.⁹⁷ Pool asserts that Till’s “broken body breathed life into the law by pulling the abstract claims about equality of *Brown v. Board* into the realm of flesh and blood.”⁹⁸ However, she also notes that not every instance of political mourning is successful in demonstrating the failures of existing systems and in generating a widespread sense of responsibility necessary for altering a community’s status quo, writing that, “when the polity denies complicity in creating conditions that lead to loss, dominant identities can harden and exclusionary policies be more easily enacted.”⁹⁹ The importance of Bradley’s continual insistence on the witnessing of Till’s body by herself, those attending the public funeral in Chicago, and the wider audience of *Jet* magazine where the photograph was initially published is therefore in its “[making] visible the invisible violence of everyday life suffered by those on the margins.”¹⁰⁰

In order for a moment of political mourning to become a politics of mourning, Pool identifies four essential aspects for the mobilization of a citizen’s death to achieve

⁹⁶ Pool, “Mourning Emmett Till,” 417.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 417, 444.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 416.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 417-418.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 418.

meaningful political and legal change. The first requirement is that the belonging of those who have died to the political community must already be contested and under debate so that the loss can be understood as an indication of a deeply-rooted problem, and not as a single exceptional tragedy. The loss and subsequent mourning must also be made visible to individuals outside of the ethnic or racial group of the deceased person, thus extending the affective influence of one community's grief and the circumstances that caused it to those otherwise unaware of, unrelated to, or unconcerned with such issues. Furthermore, formal legal recourse must be attempted, but the law must ultimately be unable to provide an adequate remedy or solution for the loss and its attendant reasons. The failure of the existing legal system therefore demonstrates an urgent need for change to ensure it can be capable of responding to and redressing similar instances in a way that more appropriately reflects the larger community's developing political sensibilities. Consequently, the final requirement consists of the explicit effort of activists to assert collective responsibility for the death in order to mobilize the loss for political ends. Thus, Pool argues that each of the four outlined aspects necessary for political mourning to become a politics of mourning was a factor in the case of Emmett Till's murder, allowing the moment to have successfully expanded the "boundaries of belonging" and permit the life of a black teenager to be grieved by a wider American public.¹⁰¹

Pool's analysis of Till's photograph establishes a direct connection between the visibility of violence and suffering and the political mobilization of the witnesses of the Other's pain, though she qualifies that this relationship is not automatic or guaranteed in every instance, cautioning that certain conditions must be present for an image like that

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 420-422.

of Till's body to inspire a social and political movement that culminates to structural change. Her article therefore reflects the approach of this project to images of pain and the communicative potential between the subject and the viewer since she recognizes both the impact of the photograph and the limits imposed on the audience by the context in which it exists. In comparison with Sontag's position on photography, Pool similarly acknowledges that an image alone cannot adequately speak to the spectator and induce a comprehensive understanding of the violence depicted. While Sontag required a supplementary narrative to promote a meaningful and attentive engagement with the conditions captured by an image, Pool presents instead a specific context in which the spectator's initial shock can develop into political action. Pool's concern is less with the audience's ability to fully and rationally understand the suffering of the Other, as is the case for Sontag, and is focused more on the affective response to a photograph of pain. Sontag does not fully address the affective aspect of the viewer's reaction to an image of war and death, insisting on the importance of a written text that can be read to convey the multiple and complex reasons for the violence committed against an Other. Pool, alternatively, notes the role of affect in the development of a politics of mourning, arguing that one of the requirements for a death to achieve political change is that the loss must be mourned by a wider community. For Pool, therefore, the photograph of Till's lynched body was able to communicate the violence he suffered and his mother's pain because of the affective response it prompted from those outside of the black American community, and not necessarily because an accompanying narrative explained his experience to the audience. She emphasizes that it is specifically through grieving for

Emmett Till that the liberal white American viewers in the North accepted the black teenager as belonging to their community and as recognizably human.

The issue of political inclusion and social exclusion for African Americans prior to the civil rights movement that is raised by the image of Till's lynched body suggests a discrepancy between their formal legal status as citizens and their lived realities and daily experiences. The differentiated citizenship of black Americans and white Americans was not necessarily subtle or informal, since the segregation of bodies was established through legal means following the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves in the United States. The shocking element of Till's murder was therefore not necessarily the incident itself, but the brutality and extreme violence he clearly suffered before being killed. The marginalization of African Americans was not an unusual aspect for either the white communities in the North or South, since the former were aware of the latter's continual resistance to desegregation. It was the extent of racial thinking and the persistence of lynching that was previously unknown to white Americans of the northern states and publicized by Till's murder. Though challenges to segregation laws were gradually achieving structural changes in parts of the United States, the circulation of Till's photograph directly confronted the spectator with the question of his meaningful belonging to the wider American community, which grieved the loss of its members. As Pool notes in her article, the image of a black teenager's mutilated body forced the white liberal viewer of the northern states to face the violent reality of differentiated citizenship that was made possible, in part, by her lack of concern for and potentially willful unawareness of the extreme marginalization and continual oppression of black Americans in the South.

However, the act of witnessing the photograph of Emmett Till, understood as both an image of mourning and as an image of his lynching, is not a simple task. As previously stated, this dissertation's approach to the selected photographs is not one premised on the assumption that the right picture of pain will automatically mobilize the viewer against the reasons for the violence experienced by an Other. Several of the theorists discussed thus far caution against such an uncomplicated analysis of images, their circulation, and the audience's interpretation and interaction with photographs of suffering. The act of witnessing and viewing images of pain cannot be presupposed as beneficial in every instance, but can be a form of violence against the photographic subject as well. In a brief online reflection on James Allen's exhibit, "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America," Eric Lott elaborates on the issues surrounding the continued violence of viewing lynching photographs. He first clarifies that the images of black lynched bodies "are not mere recordings of vigilante violence but violent acts in and of themselves," which complete the mob's lynching rituals.¹⁰² Lott specifically refers to the photographs as lynching pictures, and not as pictures of lynchings, in order to emphasize their participatory role in the violence and to characterize the spectator's viewing of the images as similarly violent. He emphasizes that the modern technology of photography is fundamentally different from other forms of visual representation, like painting, which can only approximate or recreate its subject matter. Photographs, alternatively, can only exist because their subject matter "actually happened," and this distinction correspondingly effects the spectator's viewing of the images, making the act more intimate.¹⁰³ For Lott, the differences between the picture and the event it captures,

¹⁰² Eric Lott, "A Strange and Bitter Spectacle," *First of the Month*, June 1, 2002.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

and between the image's subject and the viewer are blurred, so that the duration of the lynching is extended to reach contemporary audiences, who "unavoidably share a skin with both the lynchers and their victims in an ongoing horror."¹⁰⁴ As such, his primary concern is to challenge and trouble the position of innocence a viewer of the modern exhibit may be tempted to adopt when viewing the photographs, and to examine instead the possible ways in which the spectacle of lynching continues to implicate a 21st century audience. Lott identifies the difficulty for the spectator to recognize and admit her participation in the event by noting that, "[i]f it's way too easy to ignore our current complicity in these pictures, it may be because so much in these pictures constitutes shadowy evidence...of things not seen there. Photography is a surface art; it hides as much as it reveals. Their mystery consists in their holding so much that we cannot see beyond the flat picture surface."¹⁰⁵ The contemporary witnessing of the lynching pictures, therefore, is not an uncomplicated act and requires a degree of awareness and critical reflection from those engaging with the photographs.

Lott's comments regarding the relationship between the contemporary spectator and the lynching pictures remain relevant to the image of Emmett Till, and raise questions crucial to the approach adopted in this project for reading images as a text. His analysis serves as a reminder that the meaning of a photograph of violence is not predetermined and guaranteed to motivate the viewer against the injustice in every instance. Though the image of Till's lynched body had an arguably progressive overall influence on its audience in 1955, as demonstrated by its instigation of widespread public mourning and its subsequent role in the development of the civil rights movement, this

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

reaction to the photograph was not uniform at the time of its initial dissemination and cannot be assumed to have remained unchanged in the time since then.

As Ranciere's previously introduced conception of the shift in the regime of art from a mimetic one to an aesthetic one suggests, Emmett Till's image cannot be assumed to convey a meaning that is static, self-evident, and uncontested, or to produce any kind of predictable, uniform, and natural response. The primary distinction between the mimetic and aesthetic regimes of art is the belief of the former that photographs of suffering will inevitably affect the spectator and automatically move her to mobilize against the injustice represented. The photograph of Emmett's body certainly inspired a collective reaction against the persistent and explicit racism of the South, however it is less clear that Bradley's decisions to see her son's body for herself, to permit others to view it at his open-casket funeral, and to show the American public what had been done to a fourteen year old boy were specifically motivated by an intention to further the civil rights movement. Instead, Bradley was primarily acting as a grieving mother, making the claim that Till's life had been a human one and asserting her right to mourn his loss as such. She did not insist on the witnessing of his corpse for the sole purpose of uncovering the racial violence that whites continued to perpetrate against blacks in Mississippi, or to provide an icon for the denunciation of white supremacy.¹⁰⁶ That this is what the image of Emmett Till's disfigured face achieved, and that it contributed to the political mobilization of Americans is not exclusively the result of Bradley's actions, as the assumptions of the mimetic regime of art would imply. Instead, the particular response of

¹⁰⁶ Pool, "Mourning Emmett Till," 429.

the public in 1955 and the development of a moment of political mourning was not a guaranteed outcome of the photograph's dissemination.

Azoulay's proposed notion of the citizenry of photography therefore more accurately accounts for the impact of the image in the aesthetic regime, since it recognizes the diverse ways in which the multiple protagonists of the photographic event interacted with and understood Till's photograph and the grievance his mother presented. For instance, the difference between Bradley's reasons for insisting on the witnessing of her son's body and the influence of the visibility of the lynched corpse on its audiences attests to Azoulay's assertion that photographs are not an expression of a single, sovereign, stable point of view, and that none of the protagonists can completely dictate the ways in which an image spreads and communicates. In addition, the reactions of white spectators in the South are starkly unlike those of white spectators in the North and black Americans. One example of the former's response to Bradley's actions is articulated by a man briefly interviewed on television prior to the trial of Bryant and Milam when he states, "I can't understand how a civilized mother could put the dead body of her child on public display."¹⁰⁷ Though referring to Bradley as a "civilized mother," the speaker immediately contests this claim by asserting that he, a white man, does not recognize Bradley's actions as those of a civilized person. For white liberals in the North, alternatively, Emmett Till's photograph provided a concrete means of understanding, relating to, and interpreting the lived reality and experiences of the black community.¹⁰⁸ Such opposing perceptions of the same image therefore demonstrate the

¹⁰⁷ "The Murder of Emmett Till."

¹⁰⁸ Pool, "Mourning Emmett Till," 416.

changeability of the photograph's meaning through its circulation among a range of various individuals, as Azoulay argues in her work.

Thus, Azoulay's particular conception of photography and the fluidity of the significance of images support Ranciere's notion of the aesthetic regime of art, premised as it is on a fundamental break between the representation of a reality and its efficacy in raising a specific ethical response from the spectator. However, given this disruption in the continuity of intellectual recognition and appropriate emotion, or the dissensus that Ranciere maintains characterizes the aesthetic regime and emancipates the spectator, it becomes increasingly important to be attentive to and consider the possible distortions communicated through the image. Since the meaning of a photograph depicting an Other's pain cannot be assumed as natural or evident, the viewer's recognition of the subject's claim and their fundamental interrelationality is similarly not automatic or guaranteed. The established, and often racialized, ways of knowing can therefore significantly influence the emancipated spectator's critical engagement with an image of suffering, potentially obstructing her from hearing the claim of an Other, and seeing the life depicted as equally human and worth grieving.

For this reason, Barthes' interpretation of myth as composed of a form, a concept, and a resultant signification that functions to distort reality and naturalize historically produced conditions is adopted as an initial means for studying the images under discussion in this dissertation. The example of Emmett Till's photograph, the various frames through which it can be interpreted, and the shifting meaning of witnessing for the spectator attests to the fluidity of the image and the consequent importance of beginning with a structured approach to reading the following two photographs as a text. Despite

the effectiveness of Till's image in the development of the civil rights movement, the mobilization of American citizens for the achievement of significant structural change, and the seemingly uniform message it communicated to contemporary spectators in 1955, it also challenges the assumption that a photograph of an Other's pain is sufficient for raising awareness in the audience of their complicity in the violence committed, and of their shared humanity with the photographic subject. The image alone did not accomplish the resultant progressive response, but the wider context in which Till was brutally lynched crucially directed his mother's decisions to promote the public viewing of his mutilated body and the circulation of the image of his corpse, ultimately influencing the spectator's recognition of his life as human and therefore grieveable. Thus, the questions raised by Emmett Till's case, and that guide the ensuing case studies and discussion of the contemporary refugee crisis surrounding Europe's borders with the Middle East and North Africa are does an audience always acknowledge the violence of exclusion in the photograph of a suffering child? In comparison first with the image of Alan Kurdi's drowned body lying on a Turkish beach, does significant structural and legal change always accompany the circulation of a photograph of a dead child's body?

While the case of Emmett Till exemplified the violence of exclusion from meaningfully belonging to the nation-state's citizen body, Alan Kurdi's experience reflects a more literal example of the conditions and dangers of living in exile, as it is commonly understood. Nonetheless, when the photograph of the young Syrian migrant was circulated and reported on during the weeks following his drowning on September 2, 2015, the expectation was that the image would inspire and mobilize a movement in reaction against the circumstances of his death, as Till's photograph had in the late 1950s. The general interpretation of this moment among the audience of mainstream media outlets based in the West was that Alan Kurdi represented a crucial watershed event in the response to, and management of, the identified refugee crisis in the area where Europe and the Middle East meet. The global attention to the migrants surrounding the Mediterranean and Aegean seas generated by the image, and intensified through social media, pressured various governments to accept and resettle more refugees, and an increasing number of individuals and institutions responded by contributing to their financial sponsorship. That the photograph influenced an immediate and rapid response to the situation of those refugees risking their lives to reach Europe is evident, however the extent to which the spectator is able to critically engage with the complexity of the crisis, recognize the violence of contemporary migrancy, and understand her fundamental interrelationality with the photographic subject is the focus of the ensuing analysis. Barthes' conceptualization of myths and approach for reading an image as a text direct the case study of Kurdi's photograph, which therefore begins by focusing on the audience before considering the context of the image in order to understand the message conveyed of the context to the identified audience.

Since the image of Alan Kurdi's body lying on the beach in Bodrum was widely and rapidly circulated in various ways, including by social media, it is both impractical and unnecessary to refer to the audience of the photograph in its entirety. The ensuing examination will therefore focus on the viewer that is most directly addressed by the European, American, and Canadian newspapers and magazines that either printed the image or reported on it. That the photograph was specifically taken with the intention of being shared in the news is fairly certain due to the fact the photographer, Nilufer Demir, works for Turkey's Dogan News Agency. However it generated a serious discussion among "mainstream media" outlets about whether or not they would decide to circulate an image of a dead child.¹⁰⁹ Peter Bouckaert, the director of the Human Rights Watch, generally works with newspaper and photo editors concerning their coverage of humanitarian crises, and expressed the rationale for publishing Demir's photograph in an article in *TIME* as the understanding that "this is an image people have to see. This is an image that can galvanize attention around a crisis that has been ignored for too long."¹¹⁰ Bouckaert's comments provide some indication of the type of audience those media organizations that included the image were attempting to address. For example, the viewer is assumed to be an individual either unaware or unwilling to face of the scale and severity of the refugee crisis in the areas surrounding Europe's borders with Turkey. She is also understandably perceived to be geographically removed from the crisis, since "mainstream media" most likely refers to organizations based in the West. The viewer would thus have little to no direct, personal, or daily experience with the circumstances of "Europe's boat people," and must rely on publications like *TIME* or *Maclean's* to

¹⁰⁹ Oliver Laurent, "What the Image of Aylan Kurdi Says About the Power of Photography," *TIME*, September 4, 2015.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

humanize the refugee crisis.¹¹¹ Bouckaert is additionally quoted as stating that, “my hope is that this image will not just shock us,” similarly revealing the targeted audience is one who would be shocked by the drowning of a Syrian toddler while attempting to reach Greece with his family.¹¹²

The immediate context of the photograph of Alan Kurdi is therefore one that the majority of the selected audience has little or no direct experience with, as it centers on the refugee crisis stemming from the Middle East and concentrated in the area surrounding the Aegean Sea, on the territorial boundaries of Europe. The image depicts the body of a single Syrian child who had drowned while attempting to cross the border between Turkey and Greece. These few details conveyed in the photograph, however, do not represent the entirety of the circumstances of Alan Kurdi’s death. For example, Alan Kurdi was only one of at least twelve migrants, including his mother, his brother Ghalib, and four other children, to drown from the same overcrowded rubber dinghy the smugglers had provided.¹¹³ Furthermore, the scale of the existing refugee crisis, or Europe’s boat people, is similarly absent from the single image under discussion. The day after the boat carrying Alan Kurdi, his family, and other unnamed refugees capsized, the calculated number of Syrians displaced by the civil war was four million, the calculated number of migrants that had reached Europe was 400,000 as of 2015 alone, and the calculated number of those that had gone missing or died attempting to migrate was 2,898.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid.; “Europe’s boat people,” *The Economist*, April 25, 2015.

¹¹² Laurent, “What the Image of Aylan Kurdi Says.”

¹¹³ The Canadian Press, “Drowned Syrian migrant boy’s father says he blames Canada for tragedy,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 10, 2015.

¹¹⁴ Jonathon Gatehouse, “His name was Alan Kurdi,” *Macleans*, September 3, 2015.

Such additional facts, details, and statistics are not communicated directly through the photograph itself, but are often provided in the accompanying text or narrative. This reflects Sontag's arguments regarding the restrictions of images to make a spectator understand the pain she witnesses, instead of momentarily being shocked or otherwise moved by the suffering of an Other. For Sontag, the narrative is necessary for the viewer to comprehend the violent circumstances depicted in a photograph, to challenge the formal rationalizations provided for the suffering by established powers, and to acknowledge the ways in which her own privilege is related to the Other's pain. Only a written text can encourage the spectator to meaningfully protest against human suffering, while an image is limited to merely eliciting a brief recognition of the violence depicted as reprehensible. Though Sontag emphasizes that a narrative has a greater communicative potential than a photograph, she does not discuss how a written text may also be selective in what is included and misleading in the framing of an Other's pain. As such, Sontag appears to demonstrate an understanding that a narrative can provide all the explanation a spectator will need to critically engage with such violent realities as war. This position is similar to the assumption that the right image of pain is sufficient for ensuring a particular and desired response from the audience, who will inevitably be moved by the suffering depicted to mobilize against its continuation. However, this dissertation does not adopt such an interpretation of either photographs or narratives, and focuses instead on the broader context in which both forms of communication circulate and the potential obstacles to the viewer's recognition of an Other's life as grievable and therefore human in viewing an image.

The photograph of Alan Kurdi's body lying on the beach in Bodrum, Turkey is comparable to the previously discussed image of Emmett Till's mutilated face taken at his open-casket funeral. The first evident similarity between the two photographs is the depiction of a young boy's death, though with important differences in historical contexts. Till was a black teenager visiting Mississippi who had transgressed the strict and racialized social order by whistling at a white woman, leading her husband and his half-brother to kidnap and kill the fourteen year old from Chicago a few days after the initial incident. The deliberate and vicious murder of Emmett Till is therefore very different from the unintentional drowning of three year old Alan Kurdi in the Aegean Sea. The black and white image of fourteen year old Till was taken with his mother's permission at his public funeral, and the spectator is directly confronted with the brutality done to him, and his face in particular. The simple photograph of Kurdi was taken from a distance, hardly shows his face, as his body is lying prone on the beach, and the toddler appears virtually untouched and unharmed. The spectator is instead confronted with the entirety of his little corpse, wearing a red t-shirt, blue shorts, and sneakers that are clearly soaked through. Kurdi's body was captured in a moment and from a distance by a photographer, seemingly without hesitation or concern over whether or not the parents or Turkish officials would allow it. What is most notable and shocking in the photograph of Till is the mutilation of his face that renders him practically unrecognizable and serves as clear and uncontested evidence of the violence of racism in the American South. Kurdi's corpse, alternatively, shows little visible marks or traces of his death besides the fact that he is still noticeably wet from drowning in the sea, which facilitates the spectator's identification with his seemingly untouched body. Additionally, his evidently young age

renders it difficult for the viewer to imagine the toddler's death as somehow necessary or rational. In the example of Alan Kurdi, therefore, it is his small and almost peaceful body that poses a challenge to the viewer and asks of her why such a young and innocent child had died in this way.

The comments of Will Wintercross, a war photographer for the Daily Telegraph, attest to the complexity of Kurdi's image and the act of witnessing his death when he states "the picture is shocking but half of what happens when you see it is subconscious – you are filling in the blanks."¹¹⁵ Though he is most likely referencing the larger context of the refugee crisis and the related conflict in Syria that the audience is presumed to be familiar with, he also identifies both the openness of the photograph to interpretation and the active role of the spectator in understanding what is depicted. Thus, despite the possibility that Wintercross means only to allude to the political circumstances and scale of the crisis, his comments attest to the fact that the image does not perfectly communicate the entirety of the phenomenon, and the spectator consequently has a degree of agency and responsibility towards the photograph, which reflects the approach to reading images adopted in this dissertation. The following part of the analysis of the photograph of Alan Kurdi's drowned body on the Turkish beach therefore focuses on the broader context of the Syrian refugee crisis identified along Europe's borders, and the limitations that racialized ways of knowing and seeing continue to impose on the Western spectator.

A significant aspect of the identified refugee crisis in Europe and contemporary migrancy is the fundamentally biopolitical nature of such modern experiences of exile.

¹¹⁵ Joel Gunter, "Alan Kurdi: Why one picture cut through," *BBC News* September 4, 2015.

Michel Foucault's theorization of bio-power is partly based on his distinction between the right of death and power over life, and the implications of such differences. For instance, the right of death is characteristic of sovereign power, while the power over life is characteristic of bio-power. The sovereign's right of death refers to a right to kill external and internal threats, whether directly or indirectly, and is ultimately symbolized by the sword. The right of death is therefore very different from a more general and symmetrical power over life and death, which the sovereign did not possess since it could not create life and could only exercise the right of the sword at the moment of an individual's death. Foucault defines the sovereign's power as "the right to *take* life or *let* live" in order to articulate the "dissymmetry" of the right of death.¹¹⁶ The power over life is a similarly unbalanced part of bio-power, which becomes focused on a human population instead of a sovereign body. In order to protect a population and ensure its survival, the governing power must concern itself with the life of that population, and not its death. Foucault states that bio-power is "what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life."¹¹⁷ The shift from sovereign power to bio-power is identified by the emergence of two forms or mechanisms of power in the 17th century. The first is the "*anatomo-politics of the human body*" and the second is the "*bio-politics of the population*." Foucault clarifies that the anatomo-politics of the human body refers to the disciplinary technology of the body, and that the bio-politics of the population refers to the regulatory technology of life. He outlines three key and definitive elements of bio-politics, namely that its primary focus is the population, it is concerned with serial phenomena that operate on a mass level, and its

¹¹⁶ Michel Foucault, "Right of Death and Power over Life," in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 40-42.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42-43, 47.

ultimate aim is to regularize the population by regulating such random, permanent, and general conditions as mortality rates and life expectancy.¹¹⁸

Thus, according to Foucault's formulation of biopower's right to make live or let die, and its operation on the scale of populations and masses, the management of the Syrian refugee crisis is intimately connected to geopolitical decisions relating to the material support the lives of the migrant populations surrounding the Turkish border and arriving on the shores of Greece. The identification of those leaving Syria as refugees by the Office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees, or the UN Refugee Agency, is due to their lack of protection by their government in their country of origin. As recognized refugees, these migrants are defined as "people for whom denial of asylum has potentially deadly consequences," and therefore require international protection instead.¹¹⁹ However, the existing conditions under which refugees must live once leaving Syria remain very different from those that are presumed to govern the life of the Western spectator. Despite the efforts of organizations like the UNHCR, many migrants continue to "[live] in inadequate shelters, [go] hungry, [miss] out on educational opportunities, and they are also facing increasingly negative reactions rooted in xenophobia and fear."¹²⁰ Those Syrians that had initially crossed into neighbouring countries like Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, or Iraq, were frequently not permitted to work due to their status as refugees, and therefore could not remain and begin to resettle. In addition, the increased duration of displacement detrimentally impacts children in terms of their education and their ability "to live a productive life," whether they return to

¹¹⁸ Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," 66-67, 69.

¹¹⁹ UNHCR "Refugees' and 'Migrants' –Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)" last modified March 16, 2016.

¹²⁰ Amin Awad, "10 Insights About the Syrian Refugee Crisis Five Years On," *UN Refugee Agency*.

Syria or settle elsewhere.¹²¹ The humanitarian programs run by the UNHCR are primarily concerned with the survival of the refugees, but the agency does not have the support or financial resources to sufficiently address the quality of the lives it aims to protect.

As such, the conditions of living in exile as a refugee would resemble those of being let to die if it were not for the basic aid provided by international non-governmental and non-profit organizations. Nonetheless, the humanitarian work of such agencies are not enough to effectively respond to or redress the biopolitical violence that has resulted in the Syrian refugee crisis, of which the death of Alan Kurdi as captured in the image under discussion was one consequence. The less than satisfactory circumstances of contemporary refugees is highlighted by their attempts to reach Europe, because “the idea that they could seek asylum in a country offering the combination of safety, work prospects and education [is] worth the steep smugglers’ fees and the danger of getting there.”¹²² In migrating towards Greece through Turkey and the Aegean Sea, the migrants at the center of the identified crisis along Europe’s border with the Middle East demonstrate their rejection of their limited living situation as refugees in poorer countries, and their desire to improve their material conditions by proceeding to a country that is believed to govern by making its population live, instead of letting it to die. Thus, the “dramatic movements” towards the West attest to the agency of the refugees and their ability to make a direct political claim on Europe, since “to refuse internment at the

¹²¹ Melissa Fleming, “Six reasons why Syrians are fleeing to Europe in increasing numbers,” *The Guardian*, October 25, 2015.

¹²² *Ibid.*

borders of Europe; to want more for your children than charity; to risk everything by crossing seas and land borders –these are all political acts.”¹²³

However, as Azoulay argues, a photograph can similarly represent the political claim or grievance of an Other, which the spectator is responsible for recognizing and understanding. The study of Alan Kurdi’s image must therefore consider also whether or not the selected audience critically engages with the claim his drowned body presents against the biopolitical violence of modern exile. An analysis that focuses solely on the photograph itself, and criticizes what is or is not included, places the obligation entirely on the photographic subject to communicate effectively with the viewer. Such an approach diminishes the fact that the spectator also has a duty to actively witness and comprehend the pain of an Other. Thus, the ability of the spectator to see the suffering of an Other and to hear the grievance voiced through the photograph requires similar attention in the reading of the Kurdi’s image as a text.

A significant potential obstacle to the communicative power of photographs depicting an Other’s pain is the persistent influence and operation of racial thinking. As such, David Theo Goldberg’s arguments in *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* are helpful to the analysis of Alan Kurdi’s image, the wider context in which it exists, and the ability of the audience to recognize the claim he presents as a member of the citizenry of photography. Goldberg critically challenges the assertion that racism is dead and that modern governments and society have progressed beyond such overtly violent ways of thinking, arguing instead that race still informs the knowledge,

¹²³ Awad, “10 Insights”; Stewart Motha, “The Redundant Refugee,” *Critical Legal Thinking*, November 6, 2015.

and directs the actions, of the neoliberal state and its civil society.¹²⁴ He identifies the shift of the use of racial logic from within the formal and explicit realm of the state to the diffuse and privatized realm of civil society, which is less regulated and governed by the liberalism's respect for private property, as a crucial reason for its discrete continuation.¹²⁵ Goldberg terms the contemporary manifestations of racial thinking as "born again racisms," which he defines as

racism without race, racism gone private, racism without the categories to name it as such... an unrecognized racism for there are no terms by which it could be recognized: no precedent, no intent, no pattern, no institutional explication... it is a perfectly transparent –a virtual –racism, unseen because see-through. It is a racism of profiles denied, the claim to perfected clones and copies, privatized preferences, policed boundaries, and policy restraints.¹²⁶

Since the neoliberal state has declared itself raceless and proliferated the assumption of society having progressed beyond racism, the terms required to identify, discuss, and confront ongoing instances of racially motivated violence have disappeared, which renders its continued operation in civil society "less virile perhaps but certainly more unreachable by critical intervention."¹²⁷ Goldberg ultimately argues that neoliberalism has purged race "from the explicit lexicon of public administrative arrangements and their assessment while remaining robust and unaddressed in the private realm."¹²⁸

Goldberg's theorization of born again racisms and their proliferation in civil society remains relevant to the present study of the photograph of Alan Kurdi's drowned body lying on a Turkish beach because it demonstrates that racial thinking can influence the spectator's engagement with the image. The more subtle and virtual invisibility of

¹²⁴ David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 27-30.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-42, 52.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 341.

modern racisms facilitates the observation of differences among individuals, impeding the viewer's realization of an Other's claim as represented in an image of suffering and the fundamental interrelationality that exists between bodies regardless of race or citizenship. Azoulay conceptualized the relationship between the spectator and the photographic subject as one between citizens who act in solidarity with one another, as opposed to adhering to the interests of a nation-state. The connections between, and responsibilities of, the various members of the citizenry of photography, however, are premised on the recognition of the equal and shared humanity of every individual. As such, Butler's writing suggests that, when a citizen spectator grieves for the life of a non-citizen and mourns a death conveyed to her through a photograph, she does so from an acknowledgment of the humanity of the Other and the interrelationality of their bodies.

In *Exile and Pride*, Clare presents a conceptualization of the body and its constitutive interrelationality with other bodies that attests to its fundamental and pre-existing nature, and supports Butler's previously stated claim that to deny or argue with the condition results in violence. In opposition to the image of living in exile on the mountain that was elaborated on in the literature review of this dissertation, Clare proposes that the body has the potential to mitigate the alienation felt by serving as home for the individual, if conceived of appropriately. He writes, "the body as home, but only if it is understood that bodies are never singular, but rather haunted, strengthened, underscored by countless other bodies," and "the body as home, but only if it is understood that place and community and culture burrow deep into our bones."¹²⁹ In both statements, Clare affirms the multiplicity of the body and its inherent openness to the

¹²⁹ Clare, *Exile and Pride*, 11.

touch of others as either individuals or collective groups. The use of the term singular in this theorization of the body signifies that it is never enclosed, independent, self-sustaining, entire, and complete in and of itself, further clarifying its the necessary plurality and connection with other bodies. Clare also notes the deeply rooted effects of an individual's surroundings on the body, which becomes shaped and influenced by the material conditions and experiences of her life. As such, the body is essentially constituted by others, whether acting individually or as a community on a person, which substantiates Butler's insistence of the condition of interrelationality as predetermined and fundamental to humanity that cannot and should not be argued against.

The ability of racial thinking to limit an audience's recognition of their interrelationality with the photographic subject is exemplified in a brief article published online a few months after Alan Kurdi's death, in which Nadine El-Enany raises the question "[h]ow did it come about that white Europeans were able, all of a sudden, to humanise the body of a refugee, least of all, the body of a Muslim?"¹³⁰ She focuses on the toddler's appearance, and the fairly light colour of his skin in particular, which she argues facilitated a white European audience's identification with Kurdi. El-Enany contrasts the photograph of the small light-skinned child dressed in a t-shirt, shorts, and sneakers with images of refugees who look more visibly different from the white European spectator she is primarily concerned with, such as the bearded man, the woman in a hijab or burka, or darker-skinned children. Such "coded" examples of Muslim migrants obstruct the audience's recognition of their lives as grieveable and consequently human, often provoking apprehension and fear instead due to the pervasive Islamophobia that exists in

¹³⁰ Nadine El-Enany, "Aylan Kurdi: The Human Refugee," *Law Critique*, January 5, 2016, accessed March 21, 2016, doi: 10.1007/s10978-015-9175-7.

European societies.¹³¹ Thus, though Alan Kurdi's photograph is not the first one of a migrant body washed ashore, no previous image was capable of inspiring a comparable sense of identification and compassion. The hashtag *#CouldBeMyChild* that was trending online following the circulation of Kurdi's image illustrates one popular response to the photograph, however it is not adequate evidence of the audience's critical understanding of the crisis and their fundamental connection with situation of the refugees.¹³²

As El-Enany identifies, a common reaction among the audience at the focus of this analysis was to imagine their own children in Alan Kurdi. In addition to the online hashtag *#CouldBeMyChild*, a frequent comment in many articles reporting on the image was that "this could be my child" or "our children could be on that beach, too," revealing that the viewer of the photograph cannot recognize her connection to the Kurdi family unless she can personally identify with the situation by seeing her own children in the young Syrian boy.¹³³ Furthermore, in the previously mentioned TIME article, Bouckaert is also quoted as hoping that the photograph "will push us to take a personal commitment to try to stop these senseless deaths in the Mediterranean."¹³⁴ His statement suggests that the necessary response from the spectator is to voluntarily adopt a personal commitment to aiding the refugees, as opposed to recognizing her connection to the crisis and acting responsibly. The photograph of Alan Kurdi therefore encourages a very selective understanding of the inter-relationality between the viewer and the context of the refugee crisis, as supported by the reports that often accompany the image in newspapers and magazines. If the audience only identifies with him as parents, and only chooses to act

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Laurent, "What the Image of Aylan Kurdi Says."; Irina Dumitrescu, "Why 'that' photo mattered this time: Our children could be on that beach, too," *The Washington Post*, September 8 2015.

¹³⁴ Laurent, "What the Image of Aylan Kurdi Says."

out of personal commitment rather than responsibility, it distorts the plurality of Alan Kurdi's body, referring specifically to how it is "haunted, strengthened, underscored by countless other bodies," including those living in Europe, the United States, and Canada.¹³⁵ This common reaction to the photograph among the identified viewers of the presented analysis consequently influences how the governments of Western nation-states respond to the currently acknowledged crisis concerning primarily Syrian refugees attempting to reach Greece, but also the lack of recognition or action for other refugees and other migration crises that have not yet forced their struggles onto Europe.

In addition to misrepresenting the existing relationship between the West and the refugee crisis concentrated along Europe's borders with the Middle East, the photograph of Alan Kurdi, as it appears in the European, American, and Canadian media, does not critically engage with the wider context of twenty-first century migrancy and the biopolitical violence of exile. The focus on the Syrian refugees aides in displacing the root of the refugee problem from the exclusionary structure of the nation-state that originated in Europe, to the civil conflict located in the Middle East. The historical development and broader issue of contemporary migrancy and global displacement as elaborated on by Arendt and Said, respectively, illustrate the deliberate production of modern exile through the political status of the refugee and the stateless person. However, the photograph naturalizes this historical aspect of the current refugee crisis that is contingent on human intervention. The image further presents the drownings of migrants in the Mediterranean and Aegean seas as the ultimate tragedy that must be avoided, thus neglecting the inherent violence of living in exile as a refugee or a stateless

¹³⁵ Clare, *Exile and Pride*, 11.

individual, and being removed and alienated from what is familiar. The cultural, or social, construction of such horrendous conditions, as described by both Clare and Said, must be rationalized and the complicity of the audience must be ignored in order to preserve the identity of the West. The photograph of Alan Kurdi therefore depicts the Syrian toddler's death as a natural though regrettable consequence of the civil conflict in the Middle East to the readers of the European, American, and Canadian media publications in which the image was circulated. As such, the photograph distorts the context of twenty-first century migrancy and the biopolitical violence of exile in which Alan Kurdi's death occurred and the contemporary refugee crisis continues to exist. In doing so, the image fundamentally shapes the spectator's perception of her relationship with the migrants centered around the Aegean Sea, and limits the extent of the response to the migrants.

The previous chapter concluded with the questions of whether or not the spectator always acknowledges the violence of exclusion and exile in the image of a suffering child, and if structural and legal change always accompanies the dissemination of the photograph of a dead child. Thus far, the wider biopolitical context of the refugee crisis and the potential obstacles of enduring racialized ways of thinking, seeing, and knowing have been examined in order to assess whether or not the response generated by Alan Kurdi's image is one that is based on the selected audience's recognition of their interrelationality with the toddler and contemporary refugees. The framework adopted from Barthes, and his conceptualization of myth as a semiological system based on an emptied form that is filled with a partial concept and results in a distorted signification in particular, suggests that the photograph naturalizes several important aspects of the

current Syrian refugee crisis, impeding the development of a critically informed response that can achieve meaningful structural change. The basic details of the image, which shows the drowned body of a young child on a beach, have little meaning outside of the context constituted by mainstream media outlets in Europe, the United States, and Canada. When presented by news organizations with certain headlines and descriptive texts, the reason for viewing a photograph of a dead toddler begins to make some sense to the audience and to serve the purpose of raising awareness of the scale and severity of the migrations stemming from the Middle East. To a certain extent, the widespread circulation of Alan Kurdi's image has resulted in some acknowledgement of the humanitarian crisis surrounding Europe's border with Turkey. For example, the responses to the photograph on Twitter included the hashtags #HumanityWashedAshore and #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik as the Turkish equivalent, and now Canadian Prime Minister, then Liberal Party candidate, Justin Trudeau's statement and campaign promise that "[Stephen Harper's Conservative] government is not living up to our values. We must immediately sponsor 25K Syrian refugees and do our part to end the #refugeecrisis."¹³⁶

The reactions to Alan Kurdi's death on social media attest to the image providing the initial spark of interest that Sontag identifies as the limited impact that photographs of suffering have on an audience. Though Sontag makes note of the significant difference between the mere recognition of suffering and the transformative protest against the reasons for it, the purpose of the present work and the application of Barthes' notion of myth is to suggest a different reason for the image's limited ability to communicate with the spectator. Sontag insists on the shortcomings of photographs and emphasizes instead

¹³⁶ Tamara Baluja "Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi's photograph sparks social media tributes," *CBC News*, September 3, 2015; Justin Trudeau, Twitter post, September 3, 2015, 6:36 a.m.

that only narratives can make an audience understand the experiences of suffering and the complex factors for the pain depicted. Barthes' system of mythology proposes an alternative reason for the partial communication between an image and the spectator, and his three-part framework demonstrates the need to consider what aspects of the wider context of twenty first century migrancy, exile, and biopolitical violence are selected for the concept that fills the basic details of the photograph of Alan Kurdi with a particular meaning. The concept, however, is not always restricted to what is conveyed directly by the image and the narrative that accompanies its circulation through mainstream media. It can also include the existing and established ways of thinking that hinder the spectator's critical engagement with the photograph and its effectiveness at communicating the subject's grievance. As such, the persistence of racialized ways of knowing, seeing, and engaging with an Other is one potential obstacle to the spectator's recognition of the fundamental and unalterable interrelationality between their bodies, the claim of the Other against the violence of her circumstances, and consequently regarding the life presented in an image of suffering as human.

The identified signification, or myth, that the photograph of Alan Kurdi's drowned body on a beach in Bodrum portrays is therefore based on the denial of the grievability of Syrian migrant life by misrepresenting our fundamental interrelationality with the toddler's body and the spectator's inhibited ability to realize his life as entirely human. This violence in the image's circulation through civil society reflects the material and biopolitical violence of exile and the management of certain human populations through differentiated levels of citizenship and belonging. Thus, the presented examination focuses on the multiple forms of exile that the photograph of Alan Kurdi

provides an opportunity to discuss. The evident similarities between the condition of exile and the legal status of being a refugee, and the understanding of the violence of biopolitics as being let to die, or exiled from the desired and protected population, are some examples. However, the naturalization of the historical circumstances under which many migrants continue to die, the distortion of the claim that Alan Kurdi makes on the Western spectator, and the denial of the grievability of those lives lost by attempting to cross the Aegean Sea ultimately culminate to the rejection of such lives as human.

On October 3, 2013, almost exactly two years before the drowning of Alan Kurdi and at least twelve other Syrian refugees in the Aegean Sea, a boat carrying approximately 500 African migrants across the Mediterranean sank less than a kilometer from Lampedusa, a small Italian island representing the southernmost stretch of European territory in the area. Over 300 of the asylum seekers on board the boat drowned, making the Lampedusa shipwreck “the worst maritime disaster in the Mediterranean Sea since the Second World War” at the time that it occurred.¹³⁷ The survivors of the shipwreck were placed in the island’s detention center, which had been used to hold migrants arriving from Africa by sea since the late 1990s. Initially established as a reception centre within the island’s airport in 1996, the introduction of administrative detention two years later, in 1998, effectively converted the space into a detention centre for irregular migrants, referring primarily to those arriving in Italy by sea. The detention centre was relocated from the airport to Contrada Imbriacola, a former barracks area in the centre of the island in 2007, which is where the Italian government held the survivors of the 2013 shipwreck. Those that had been rescued and detained were charged with illegally entering the country in spite of their eligibility to apply for asylum.¹³⁸ Those that had died, alternatively, were granted honorary Italian citizenship and publically mourned the following day, through such acts as observing a minute’s silence in schools.¹³⁹

The extent of the formal and institutional response to the shipwreck was the initiation of “Mare Nostrum” by the Italian government, which is a military patrol operation with the purpose of preventing similar tragedies in the Mediterranean

¹³⁷ Nick Dines, Nicola Montagna, and Vincenzo Ruggiero, “Thinking Lampedusa: border construction, the spectacle of bare life and the productivity of migrants,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 no. 3 (2015): 430.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 430, 432.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 430; Nick Squires, “Italy mourns 300 dead in Lampedusa migrant boat tragedy,” *Telegraph* October 4, 2013.

seemingly by intercepting migrant boats from Libya before they can reach Europe's border. Global media attention and public concern briefly returned to the survivors of the shipwreck in December 2013 following a national television report that showed some of the conditions of living within the Lampedusa detention camp, particularly the practice of requiring the migrants to strip naked to be sprayed for scabies. However, even this exposition and the temporary outcry against the treatment of those detained did not result in a serious questioning or examination of the policies and reasons at the root of both the sea crossings and the detention of asylum seekers. As such, migrants continue to cross the Mediterranean from the northern African coast, and hundreds continue to drown in the attempt. Only a week after the October 2013 shipwreck, another boat sank along the same route towards Italy and over 200 individuals died.¹⁴⁰ Two years later, on April 19, 2015, an estimated 700 migrants drowned shortly after passing through Libyan waters, and the shipwreck was similarly identified as "the worst disaster yet involving migrants being smuggled to Europe."¹⁴¹ It occurred mere days after a similar incident in which 400 others died at sea.¹⁴² And, nearly on the anniversary of this latest worst-disaster-yet, another overcrowded boat leaving from Libya sank on April 20, 2016, killing nearly 500 in the Mediterranean in what was then "the deadliest migrant shipwreck in months."¹⁴³

In response to the 2015 Lampedusa shipwreck, the Italian Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, was quoted in a news article asking, "How can it be that we daily are witnessing a

¹⁴⁰ Dines, 430-431.

¹⁴¹ Kingsley, Patrick, Alessandra Bonomolo, and Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "700 migrants feared dead in Mediterranean shipwreck," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2015.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Kingsley, Patrick and Ruth Michaelson, "Hundreds feared dead in migrant shipwreck off Libya," *The Guardian*, April 20, 2016.

tragedy?”¹⁴⁴ As an attempt to answer Renzi’s charged question and provide a further perspective on the images analyzed and the issues raised thus far, the final chapter of this dissertation will focus on a photograph taken at the Lampedusa detention camp of a young survivor of the 2013 shipwreck, who is captured sleeping outside on a bare mattress in a position strikingly similar to Alan Kurdi’s corpse on the beach in Bodrum almost two years later. The significance of including this particular image of a child that was rescued and had not died in attempting to reach Europe by sea is to further the discussion of the less extreme and more subtle forms of biopolitical violence that equally characterize the condition of exile first introduced in the previous chapter. However, in contrast to the photographs of the preceding chapters, this one of the sleeping child in the Lampedusa camp was not widely circulated, did not evoke a noticeable public response, and is not well known. The age or name of the child, the circumstances of his journey, the details of this life that presumably continues, are unknown to viewers of the image. The reasons that will be suggested for the perceptible difference in the impact of the photograph of the Lampedusa child and those of Emmett Till and Alan Kurdi on the audience provide a potential answer to Renzi’s aforementioned question. The focus of the case study, in Azoulay’s terms, is to determine whether or not the claim of the Lampedusa child was heard, and what potential obstacles to the image’s communication with the spectator exist, in addition to the persistence of racial thinking, as elaborated on in the previous chapter. The ensuing discussion of the Lampedusa child’s photograph is therefore directed towards understanding why the image did not generate a noticeable response from the public, as occurred in Emmett Till’s and Alan Kurdi’s case, by adopting Barthes’ concern with myth’s distortions and naturalization of the histories of

¹⁴⁴ Kingsley, “700 migrants.”

contemporary realities and conditions. Given that this final photograph is one of a child's life that has not yet ended and this dissertation's concern with public mourning, the role of affect will also be examined primarily in reference to Lauren Berlant writing on the difference between witnessing trauma and witnessing suffering, and Lisa Guenther's writing on the progressive potential of feeling shame for the violence committed against an Other.

In contrast with the photograph of Alan Kurdi's drowned body lying alone on the same Turkish beach he, his family, and several other migrants embarked from, the image of the Lampedusa child shows a more cluttered scene from within the detention camp. Though the sleeping child is made the focus of the photograph, much else is also visible to the spectator. The mattress he lies on appears to be a bare foam pad placed directly on the earth, while other similar mattresses can be seen haphazardly set either on the flat ground or bent among the trees and rock, giving the impression of being out of doors. The large water bottles and emergency foil blankets provided by the rescuers are also strewn around, empty and not in use at the captured moment. A few other random objects and belongings make up the surroundings of the young boy sleeping, who is additionally not alone, as two adult men are nearby and partially included in the scene. The visual differences between the settings of the Lampedusa child and Alan Kurdi are therefore fairly evident, and the meanings of these differences are similarly clear and unambiguous to the viewer. One body is a corpse, and one is merely at rest. One body is drenched from drowning in the Aegean, and one is dry from being rescued in the Mediterranean. One body washed up and was returned to the side of the world he was attempting to leave, and one survived the crossing and found himself on the opposite side of the sea. One body

was singled out by mainstream media outlets and immediately recognized as emblematic of a wider problem that necessitated a rapid and humanitarian response, and one was relegated to a collection of various images showing survivors, governmental responses to, and school children's representations of the shipwreck that was the main focus of the news stories, and not the detention camp.

The Lampedusa detention centre serves as a crucial distinction between the cases of the two boys attempting to reach Europe. Since Alan Kurdi died before arriving on the shores of Greece, and the survivors in this instance found themselves still in Turkey and outside of European territory, the claim presented in the photograph was more readily acknowledged as one from genuine refugees. The survivors of the Lampedusa shipwreck, alternatively, continued to represent an unwanted problem that must be dealt with, as some were successful in their goal to enter Europe through Italy. The preferred solution to the migrant crisis remains to be the securitization and policing of national borders, and the camp is largely perceived to represent a legitimate and necessary element of such governmental policies. The image of the young child sleeping in the island's detention centre therefore reflects the measures taken towards managing the identified crisis, whereas the image of Alan Kurdi shows the increasingly regular failures of the West's approach to contemporary migrancy only after the tragedy has occurred and the extent of what can be done for the dead is much more limited. The photograph of the living child requires the spectator to face the poor conditions which thousands of asylum seekers continue to endure once leaving or being forced from their homes. The photograph of the dead child only necessitates the spectator to admit the death, an event that already took

place, cannot be altered, and is final in a sense, as shocking, regrettable, unjust, or similarly unacceptable.

Thus, the image of the Lampedusa child is one of ongoing suffering, and demands a more active and contemporaneous response of the viewer than the one of Alan Kurdi. Though the latter is still an image of suffering, because the subject is no longer living, his suffering is more easily perceived as of the past, which facilitates a more passive engagement with the photograph and the claim it presents in comparison with the former. In viewing the photograph of Alan Kurdi, as it was circulated by mainstream media outlets, the spectator is reacting to an event that already took place and cannot be altered. Consequently, the response it did manage to generate was a limited one, since it was based on individual and humanitarian action. Furthermore, the briefly motivated reaction of the spectator to Alan Kurdi's death illustrates an unawareness, or selective forgetting, of the refugee crisis in its entirety, which is not restricted to the deaths of migrants on the Mediterranean and Aegean seas, but equally includes the realities of administrative interment and detention camps. In the case of the Lampedusa child, it was the Lampedusa shipwreck itself that resulted in the increased securitization of Italy's sea borders, in the interest of protecting its own citizens and notions of European citizenship from the perceived threat of asylum seekers. The image of the survivors and conditions within the detention centre were largely left unaddressed. Such humanitarian or territorial ways of responding to the realities captured in the photographs are therefore not based on a collective recognition of responsibility and mobilization for structural change, as was the case for the image of Emmett Till. Thus, in contrast with the first case study of this dissertation, neither of the two photographs of the current refugee crisis in Europe trouble

and crucially challenge the spectator, her assumptions or perception of contemporary migrancy, and her understanding of her own position in relation to the Other.

While the differences between the two photographs, the circumstances of the boys depicted, and the extent of the public reactions to their lives are certainly not negligible, they can obscure the extent of the fundamental similarities that exist across the images and the claims they present to the spectator. As opposed to being two entirely separate photographs showing alternative aspects of the same migrant crisis along Europe's sea borders, the Lampedusa child and Alan Kurdi represent a common claim against the biopolitical violence of exile. As Said noted in his previously discussed essay, the modern condition of exile is not a natural one, but a deliberately created status, legislated by one group and imposed onto another. A significant part of the construction of 21st century exile is the organization of the modern nation-state, as examined by Arendt in her writing on citizenship and human rights.

Arendt defines the situation of statelessness as having lost both a home and government protection. An individual's loss of home is not necessarily an unprecedented or calamitous experience, as the forced displaced of populations for political or economic reasons is a frequent occurrence throughout history. However, the impossibility of finding a new home or place in the world is a modern development that characterizes the circumstances of contemporary exiles. Arendt writes, "[s]uddenly, there [is] no place on earth where migrants [can] go without the severest restrictions, no country where they would be assimilated, no territory where they [can] found a new community of their

own.”¹⁴⁵ She therefore notes that the condition of exile, as manifested in the status of statelessness, is not due to a lack of physical space for such individuals, but is a problem of political organization, referring to the exclusionary nature of the Westphalian nation-state. As a result, the loss of home for the stateless also entails a loss of government protection and legal status in any country, and not just their own. Arendt clarifies that the loss of government protection is also not entirely unprecedented, as regulations for providing asylum to individuals persecuted in or by their own states exist. However, such policies were designed for addressing exceptional cases, and not for the increasing scale and regularity of modern migrancy.¹⁴⁶

Arendt finally states that “whoever [is] thrown out of one of these tightly organized closed communities [finds] [her]self thrown out of the family of nations altogether.”¹⁴⁷ She therefore identifies the extreme contrast between formally belonging to a nation-state and being excluded from the protections provided and ensured by the legal status of citizenship. Her connection of the status of statelessness with a discussion of contemporary human rights further emphasizes the significance of formal citizenship to a nation-state and the impact it has on the conditions of an individual’s life. Arendt’s insistence on the need for human rights to be reconceptualised according to the current circumstances of the rightless, who she identifies as the stateless, attests to the increasing importance of citizenship in a global context largely defined by migrancy and exile, as Said claims. For Azoulay, the distance created between the citizen and the non-citizen by their differentiated legal statuses prohibits the spectator from identifying with the

¹⁴⁵ Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State,” 293.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.

photographic subject and perceiving that the same powers that cause an Other's pain also govern and sustain her own life. As was proposed in the previous chapter, the characteristic nature of the violence experienced by modern exiles is fundamentally biopolitical, as it is largely based on a decision regarding which population and which lives to materially support to ensure they live, and which will be let to die instead, without any governmental aide or protection. In the two selected images of the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe, the particular forms of violence depicted vary in severity, with the Lampedusa child demonstrating the banality of exile and Alan Kurdi the extremity of the condition. The claim of each child on the spectator, however, remains constant and unchanged, despite such differences.

Lauren Berlant presents a comparable argument regarding the distinction between trauma and suffering, the affective response that the former can inspire among citizens, and the political usefulness of the resultant sentimentality to the nation-state in the chapter, "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics." She is primarily critical of the ways in which scandals or traumatic realities are represented through the media in the United States, focusing on the example of the exploitation of child workers in sweatshops. Berlant identifies the common assumption that an audience's emotional response to the regular exposition of the shocking conditions of the exploited child is beneficial because it will inevitably lead to "something at least akin to *consciousness* that can lead to *action*."¹⁴⁸ According to this logic, the figure of the child worker acts as a hero, since the pain communicated through the image alone is so transparent that it renders further explanation or contextualization through a narrative unnecessary. The

¹⁴⁸ Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics," in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 42.

“wounded image,” therefore evokes the feeling of sentimentality in the spectator, which operates when a privileged citizen feels the pain of an Other as her own and will theoretically do all that is possible to combat the misery she was exposed to.¹⁴⁹

However, Berlant notes that the response of many spectators is to seek legal change and redress to the violence they witness. She is skeptical of this tactic and the assumed capacity of traditional or nation-state-based sources of protection, such as the state, the law, or patriotic ideology, to acknowledge and incorporate the demands of excluded or subaltern groups in a way that eradicates their pain. Berlant identifies a number of reasons for her doubts of the effectiveness of sentimental politics and its reliance on the established structures of the nation-state. For example, she observes that a common misconception of sentimental politics is to identify a person by her trauma, thus oversimplifying the various historical reasons for the violent circumstances in which the individual lives and falsely promising to locate the precise source of the pain. This results in a “dubious optimism” that the law or similar formal structures can be held accountable in the way a person can for their harmful actions and neatly remedy the problem.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the limited gains that may be occasionally made through recourse to the nation-state and its institutions can work to fortify the idealized vision of a “homogenous national metaculture,” which appears as a repaired and healed single body that has not fundamentally changed and yet is still worth defending.¹⁵¹ These misunderstandings create a “sanctified mentality” and provide citizens with an “outlet, something satisfying to do in response to overwhelming structural violence.”¹⁵² Though the chapter focuses on

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 43-45.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 45.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁵² Ibid., 45.

the context of the United States, Berlant's concerns with the rationales behind the structures associated with the nation-state remain relevant to the present dissertation and its concentration on the spectator who is a recognized citizen of a Western country, and her understanding of the fundamental and unalterable relationship between herself and the subject of the photographs under discussion.

As such, Berlant's critique of the spectator's often sentimental reaction to images of exploitation and trauma reflects Sontag's previously discussed concern with the ability of photographs of suffering to fully communicate the deeply rooted and complex reasons for the pain of Others without a narrative. For Sontag, the image of pain could serve as an invitation at most for the spectator to turn to written texts and narratives in order to question the reasons for mass suffering provided by established powers. The photographs of war and disaster that are the primary focus of her book are not intended to create a sense of responsibility in the audience towards the subjects of the images. Ultimately, Sontag maintains that photographs, even those depicting the pain of Others, alone cannot initiate the spectator's recognition of her own privilege and the ways in which it may be linked to the subject's suffering. This argument is comparable to Berlant's in the shared acknowledgment of the limitations of witnessing instances and experiences of violence to induce critical reflection and the understanding necessary for significant social or political change to occur. Sontag's primary reason for her position is connected to her evaluation of shocking photographs as an only partially effective means of communication. Berlant's reasoning, however, has less to do with the communicative potential of images, and is related instead to her more general discussion on the meaning of framing pain as a single momentary traumatic event.

Berlant's stated purpose in the chapter under discussion is to examine the role of painful feeling in the construction of political worlds, and she is subsequently critical of the frequent practice of exclusively modeling pain after trauma. She maintains that the notion of pain as trauma both obscures the more continuous and systemic experiences of violence, and facilitates a sentimental response and limited attempt to address the pain by formal legal means from the observing citizens. The shock associated with witnessing a trauma often has an immediate effect on the spectator, and enables a momentary identification with the life in pain. Structural forms of pain, alternatively, are not surprising or remarkable for their singularity because they constitute the daily experiences of ordinary life for the subjects exposed to the violence. Thus, instances of pain that fall beyond the trauma model, which "are ever so common, cruel but not unusual," are less easily recognized as such and are less likely to evoke an affective reaction, whether sentimental or otherwise, from the spectator.¹⁵³ Berlant therefore advocates for a different formulation of pain, suggesting the term suffering in place of trauma for its "etymological articulation of pain and patience [that] draws its subject less as an effect of an act of violence, and more as an effect of a general atmosphere of it, peppered by acts to be sure but not contained by the presumption trauma carries, that it is an effect of a single scene of violence or toxic taxonomy."¹⁵⁴

The distinction drawn between pain as trauma and pain as suffering reflects the differences in the cases of Alan Kurdi and the Lampedusa child, and provides a means of understanding the particular reactions each photograph generated. The image of Alan Kurdi, as a single dead child on the beach in Bodrum, limits the violence communicated

¹⁵³ Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," 43, 58-60.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

to the spectator to the trauma of his drowning, a single, though final, moment of his life, and thus overlooks the more ordinary and less spectacular pain he endured as a Syrian refugee. Though it might be noted that no photograph of Alan Kurdi's life in Syria and Turkey was taken to highlight and make known the sufferings caused by civil war and displacement, this cannot be the sole reason for the global attention the image of his corpse aroused, since photographs of asylum seekers detained in camps, like the one of the Lampedusa child, existed prior to Alan Kurdi's death. However, the image of the slightly older boy sleeping in the island's detention camp after being rescued from drowning in the Mediterranean was framed entirely differently, was not widely circulated through the media, and did not inspire a global outcry against the conditions of his life that had not ended and continues to suffer. Thus, Berlant's discussed arguments regarding the affective difference between pain as trauma and pain as suffering suggests that a possible reason for the lack of public reaction to the photograph of the Lampedusa child is that it focuses on an example of the daily and ordinary forms of violence that migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers endure, unlike the image of Alan Kurdi's drowned body.

While Berlant argues that modeling pain solely after trauma generates a limited sentimentality from the witnesses of violence, she is not necessarily against all types of affective responses to the pain of Others, though she does not suggest what a more appropriate or productive emotion might be to pain if it were framed as suffering instead. The deaths of Alan Kurdi and of the hundreds of migrants from the shipwrecks off Lampedusa attract the media's attention and induce brief moments of mourning, remembrance, and activism from the general public. However, such reactions have not yet made a material impact on the flow of people continuing to cross and drown in the

Mediterranean and Aegean seas, and can therefore be interpreted as largely sentimental and not sufficiently effective in instigating social and political change. The grievances of the lives lost in attempting to reach European shores are not fully heard by the nation-states or by the spectator bearing witness to the tragedies, since the deaths are recognized as regrettable but the role of the West in the production of the so-called crisis remains obscured. The same claim of the Lampedusa child against the violence of exile is also hindered from entirely reaching and impressing upon the audience of the photograph of its fundamental interrealtionality with the Other, in part because his pain is framed in terms of suffering, and not trauma. Regardless of this difference between the two images of Alan Kurdi and the Lampedusa child, both depict the pain of modern exile, and the more appropriate and productive response that each photograph should generate from the citizen-spectator is shame, understood as “an affective response to violence and suffering in which those who have done nothing wrong –or have done everything right –feel immediately implicated.”¹⁵⁵

This particular conceptualization of shame is borrowed from Lisa Guenther’s article, “Resisting Agamben: The biopolitics of shame and humiliation,” and her critique against Giorgio Agamben’s conflation of shame with humiliation and his subsequent oversight of the constructive capacity of the emotion. Though Guenther is directly responding to Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz* and his readings of three specific texts selected for the purpose of the article, the definition of shame that she builds is helpful for moving beyond Berlant’s examination of the shortcomings of sentimentality as a reaction to witnessing pain. Guenther proposes that shame necessitates first the subject’s

¹⁵⁵ Lisa Guenther, “Resisting Agamben: The biopolitics of shame and humiliation,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38 no. 1 (2012): 63, accessed June 13, 2016, doi: 10.1177/0191453711421604.

recognition of her own “irreducible relation” to the Other.¹⁵⁶ She clarifies that the emotion is not based on the personal guilt or culpability of the subject for the violence she witnesses, but on the moral sensitivity to and basic awareness of a crime committed against an Other’s humanity. The emphasis therefore lies in the relation between the subject and the Other, and not in the purposeful and explicit acts performed by the former against the latter. Guenther elaborates that, “precisely because these systems of domination [which cause the violence] are structural rather than individual, the struggle against them presupposes some capacity...to feel implicated in crimes that one did not personally commit.”¹⁵⁷ As such, shame has the capacity to establish a sense of solidarity that traverses the separation of the human subject from the less than human Other due to its essential acknowledgment of an intersubjectivity, or interrelationality, “more fundamental than the subject [her]self.”¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, Guenther specifies that shame itself does not represent or accomplish resistance to the violence alone, but serves only as an important and necessary starting point for further action.¹⁵⁹

Though Guenther does not present shame as a final, straight forward, and unproblematic solution to the violence suffered by the Other, or as a convenient, perfectly responsible, and adequate means of responding for the witnessing subject, her observations remain crucial to the development of the current analysis of the photograph of the sleeping child at the Lampedusa detention center and the spectator’s reaction to the image. The limitations of shame to providing a necessary basis for resistance, as opposed to automatically constituting a sufficiently productive form of opposition to the violence

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 62-64.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 62.

endured by an Other, reflects Sontag's earlier stated concerns regarding the ability of images of pain to make the audience entirely understand the reasons for what has been viewed, captured, and framed by the photographer. Both Guenther and Sontag interpret the affective response of shame and the witnessing of shocking photographs, respectively, as required precursors to redressing the violence committed against particular groups and for the spectator to recognize her own complicity in the suffering of the Other. The image of the Lampedusa child was arguably not shocking enough to be widely circulated through the media, and thus did not evoke a global outcry against the conditions of the young migrant's life and the banality of the violence of exile. However, it continues to hold the potential to shame the spectator and to consequently encourage the acknowledgement of the grievance presented in its entirety, which means to be aware of the violence and of the ways in which she is also implicated in its production.

A significant element of the photograph of a young migrant boy rescued from a shipwreck and detained in the Lampedusa camp is the notion of borders, or barriers. An evident instance of a border is that the child was crossing the Mediterranean with hundreds of other asylum seekers from Libya to Italy, in an attempt to reach Europe. Those that had been rescued from the shipwreck were immediately placed in the island's detention centre, thus they had physically and territorially crossed the border, but were not formally recognized as within Europe until the Italian government processed their claims for asylum and decided on whether they would be accepted or deported. The Lampedusa detention centre therefore exemplifies the functioning of modern borders, which are defined by Etienne Balibar as "a 'sovereign' or non-democratic condition of democracy itself [that] mainly works as an instrument of security controls, social

segregation, and unequal access to the means of existence, and sometimes as an institutional distribution of survival and death: it becomes a cornerstone of institutional violence.”¹⁶⁰ The European border in particular represents the formal and legal separation of protected and supported citizens from irregular migrants arriving by sea who are perceived as a threat and are consequently subjected to strict controls and regulations. As was elaborated in the previous chapter, the specific nature of this form of institutional violence against migrant populations is essentially biopolitical, as the lives of one selected group are made to live while the lives of others are left to die. In Arendt’s terms, the distinction between citizen and non-citizen is based on belonging to a nation-state or being excluded from the family of nations and existing outside of legality entirely.

In addition to the presence of physical and geopolitical borders in the case of the Lampedusa child, a secondary barrier can also be argued to operate in the spectator’s engagement with the image of him resting in the detention centre. Unlike the photograph of Emmett Till, this final case study is not based on an example of an audience recognizing the grieveability, and thus humanity, of an Other’s life. While still representing the pain of living in exile, the image of the Lampedusa child was not widely circulated, and did not mobilize a response against the violent conditions of his life. Instead of the photograph of a shipwreck survivor functioning to develop meaningful structural change to prevent the continuation of the suffering depicted, it resulted in an increased restriction of movement and securitization of Europe’s borders against migrants from northern Africa. Furthermore, though the image is comparable to that of Alan Kurdi, as it demonstrates the circumstances of the same refugee crisis and represents a

¹⁶⁰ Etienne Balibar, “Outlines of a Topography of Cruelty: Citizenship and Civility in the Era of Global Violence,” *Constellations* 8 no. 1 (2001): 16.

similar grievance against the biopolitical violence of exile, the audience did not identify with the Lampedusa child in a noticeable way. In the case of Alan Kurdi, the spectator was able to recognize the humanity of his life and mourn his death, though the general reaction was fairly limited and momentary, and did not significantly extend to the countless other migrants and refugees surrounding Europe's sea borders. Thus, the photograph of the Lampedusa child neither elicited a response, as Alan Kurdi did just two years later, nor did it trouble the audience, as Emmett Till had in 1955. This chapter proposes that one significant barrier to the viewer's critical engagement with the photograph is the mobilization of affect. Without the spectator's acknowledgment of the suffering and grieveability of an Other's life, and the fundamental interrelationality between them, she cannot begin to feel shame for the violence committed, and can continue to rationalize its perpetration instead.

Early in the Rio 2016 Summer Olympic Games, photographs of the women's beach volleyball match between Egypt and Germany were widely shared and commented on through social media, and addressed by various news outlets. Though the debate was broadly directed to what the female athletes were wearing and the seemingly stark contrast between the German player's bikini uniforms and the Egyptian player's full-sleeved shirts and full-length leggings, it was the hijab that Doaa Elghobashy chose to wear during the game that first attracted the public's attention and initiated the online discussion. One of the two predominant interpretations of the images highlighted the cultural clash represented by the different uniforms, and the second fundamentally opposed this position and focused instead on the potential of sport to unify diverse cultures.¹⁶¹ In some instances, therefore, the spectator primarily identified Elghobashy by her dress, and her hijab in particular, while in others she was perceived first as an Olympic athlete, and second as a Muslim woman. The differing understandings of the women's uniforms and Elghobashy's decision to wear the hijab reflects some of the main concerns of this dissertation, and the questions regarding who is perceived to belong and who is not. Though the context is evidently unlike those of the photographs examined in the preceding chapters, the online reactions to the images of the women's beach volleyball match illustrates the various and disparate ways in which the question of belonging in the modern world is raised, discussed, and ultimately remains relevant outside of the formal and legal framework of citizenship.

A second contemporary example of the continued significance and shaping of who is recognized as belonging and who is excluded from the formulation of an "us" is

¹⁶¹ "Volleyball in a hijab: Does this picture show a culture clash?" *BBC News Magazine*, August 9, 2016.

Black Lives Matter. The name of the social movement directly addresses the issue of the inconsistent grievability of human lives, as first introduced in this study by Judith Butler, and challenges policing's exclusion of black lives from counting as much as other, primarily white, lives. Though the movement has generated widespread attention to police practices and behaviours in the United States, where it originated, it is also occasionally criticized for promoting the importance of specifically black lives and simultaneously neglecting other similarly marginalized lives, like those of other ethnic or racial groups. Both the Black Lives Matter group and the potentially competing position of All Lives Matter contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding the meaning of differentiated bodies and the protection and support they receive from formal governmental institutions, such as the police and justice systems. The extent of the social movement's success in achieving structural change and changing the general reluctance to recognize the persistent operation of racial thinking, however, is unclear given the recent developments in the particular cases of police shooting and killing black men in the United States, and the backlash the Toronto-based section received for interfering with the city's Pride Parade on July 10, 2016.

A final example that illustrates the limits of the general public's ability to collectively grieve and mourn the loss of human life is the reactions to the recent terrorist attacks in Europe, namely in Paris, Brussels, and Nice. The spontaneous memorials, sense of disbelief and shock, and claims of solidarity that rapidly followed each attack were the result of the audience's identification with the victims as citizens of the Western world. Similar demonstrations of public mourning and feelings of grief do not accompany every instance of mass death or tragedy that occurs and is conveyed to the

spectator through mainstream media outlets. The lives of those in unsettled nation-states in the Middle East, Africa, and south-east Asia, which are defined by the armed conflict, political unrest, economic struggles, and cultural and social difference in the news stories that inform the Western viewer, do not receive comparable attention and the suffering conveyed is not similarly identified or related with. The opposing reactions of the audience to violence that is perceived as committed against a group like themselves, and the pain endured by those understood as fundamentally different, attests to their denial of the pre-existing and unalterable interrelationality between all human lives. When this essential connection is distorted or unacknowledged, the spectator does not realize the life of an Other as entirely human, which facilitates the rationalization and naturalization of the suffering experienced as regrettable but necessary.

Each of these three disparate cases show the continued significance of the question regarding which lives and which bodies are recognized as belonging, as worth grieving when lost, and thus as human. The debate regarding the inclusion of differentiated lives in the prevailing conception of humanity is ongoing, and thus remains open and responsive to contemporary experiences and changing realities. However, the persistent exclusion of certain bodies from the formulations of what lives count as human also require adequate attention and study, which is part of the purpose of this dissertation. Given Edward Said's observation of the modern period as the age of the refugee, the displaced person, and mass immigration, the term exile is proposed as capable of addressing and understanding the current circumstances of those whose grieveability is not realized. In expanding the concept of exile beyond its essential meaning of an individual living outside of her home country, the term becomes applicable to instances

of both political expulsion and rejection through legal means, and less formal though more pervasive instances of social marginalization and alienation. Exile, in short, is suggested as an appropriate concept for denoting the denial or distortion of the basic and fundamental interrelationality of human lives.

The three selected photographs at the centre of the preceding case studies each depict a different aspect of the notion of exile that this project begins to develop. Emmett Till's lynching is a very clear example of the violence of living in exile, as captured in the image of his mutilated face, which his mother, Mamie Till-Bradley, allowed to be taken and published. The black teenager's brutal murder by at least two white men in Mississippi demonstrates the extreme and overt extent to which racial thinking continued to exist in the southern United States in 1955. However it also illustrates the more pervasive and widespread context of racial segregation and white supremacy that permitted two white men to even conceive of kidnapping, beating, and killing a fourteen year old boy for whistling at a married white woman. Emmett Till's case is most representative of the marginalization of the condition of exile, as his life was perceived of as disposable by his murderers and not worth grieving by the sheriff's department that attempted to quickly bury his body and keep it from his mother in Chicago. Thus, Till's lynching contests the meaning of his American citizenship, and emphasizes instead that not all those born in the United States belonged to the citizen body equally. Bradley's decisions to insist on seeing her son's body, to mourn his life as a mother, and to allow the public to witness both his suffering and her grief represent a claim in direct opposition to the marginalization of African Americans in 1955. In witnessing Till's pain through the photograph taken at his funeral of his hardly recognizable face, the spectator

is confronted with both the extremity and banality of exile. At the time of its initial circulation, Till's image effectively communicated with some of his fellow citizens, namely black Americans and white liberal-minded Americans in the North. This first photograph therefore represents an example in which an audience is faced with the violence of exile, is able to acknowledge the humanity of an Other, and consequently their fundamental interrelationality and responsibility to Emmett Till.

Till's image also raises several questions crucial to this project and the remaining two case studies, both of which depict the current refugee crisis surrounding Europe's sea borders with the Middle East and North Africa. Similar to the photograph of Emmett Till, the one of Alan Kurdi's drowned body lying on a beach in Turkey was widely circulated, by mainstream news outlets and through social media online. As such, it generated a significant amount of public attention, and mobilized some formal responses to the now identified crisis on Europe's shores. However, the contemporary spectator's engagement with the image is more limited than in Till's case. Though Kurdi's death was publically mourned, the audience's reaction was not based on their full realization of the humanity of his life and the countless other migrant and refugee lives he represented. The fairly widespread mourning that followed Kurdi's drowning was based instead on the Western spectator's ability to recognize her own child in the toddler. The response to the refugee crisis was restricted to a voluntary humanitarian one focused on the problem of people smuggling and increased drownings in the Aegean Sea. It did not address the more complex and deeply rooted reasons for the mass scale of contemporary migrancy, and the spectator less effectively acknowledged her interrelationality with, and obligations to, an Other. By presenting the death of a single, three year old refugee that had not reached the

Grecian coast, the photograph allows the audience to focus on this single tragedy, and not the much larger context of the refugee crisis in Europe and the circumstances of other asylum seekers. The violence of contemporary exile is therefore restricted to drowning at sea in attempting to reach Europe, and the fundamentally biopolitical nature of the condition remains distorted.

The limited extent to which the spectator critically engages with the suffering and pain of a migrant Other is significantly more evident in the final case study of this dissertation, which focuses on an image of a young boy who was rescued from a shipwreck that killed 300 asylum seekers in the Mediterranean Sea and detained in the Lampedusa camp with the other survivors. In contrast with the photograph of Alan Kurdi, which depicts an extreme consequence of modern exile, the image of the Lampedusa child resting in the detention centre presents the banality of the condition instead. Unlike either of the first two case studies, the photograph under discussion in the last chapter was not widely circulated or perceived as an image that must be witnessed by a large audience in order to effect significant change in response to his pain. As a result, very little is known about the young boy pictured, and his suffering is more easily naturalized as a necessary aspect of border controls and securitization. Though the photograph constitutes a similar grievance against the biopolitical violence of contemporary exile as that of Alan Kurdi, the spectator does not recognize the claim addressed to her, or the grieveability of the Lampedusa child's life. The preceding chapter proposed that affect has a crucial influence on the spectator in viewing images of an Other's pain, and her realization of the fundamental interrelationality that connects her to the photographic subject. Both the photographs of Emmett Till and Alan Kurdi mobilized a degree of

affect from their audiences in the form of mourning their deaths. While the Lampedusa child had not died in the shipwreck, and it is an image of his survival that is under analysis, this difference does not negate the violence he continues to endure as an unwanted migrant in Europe, and it does not preclude the possibility of an affective response from the spectator.

The purpose of this dissertation, however, is not to argue that photographs of pain and suffering cannot communicate with the spectator, and are ultimately ineffective. In relying on the theorists presented in the literature review, the approach adopted in each of the three case studies is to acknowledge the openness and fluidity of the photograph and its possible meanings, and the agency of both the photographic subject and the spectator, while also examining the established and entrenched ways of thinking, knowing, and seeing that significantly influence, frame, and potentially restrict the audience's recognition of the grieveability, and thus humanity, of an Other's life. As such, the aim of this project and the three case studies is to consider the communicative potential between a spectator and a photographic subject in an image depicting modern exile, as a condition based on the separation and exclusion of certain individuals or populations. The particular formulation and understanding of exile that is suggested is aptly summarized by Lauren Berlant, who writes:

But even "suffering" can sound too dramatic for the subordinated personhood form I am reaching toward here: imagine a word that describes a constantly destabilized existence that monitors, with a roving third eye, every moment as a potentially bad event in which a stereotyped someone might become food for someone else's hunger for superiority, and connect that to a term that considers the subjective effects of structural inequalities that are deemed inevitable under national and transnational conditions.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," 60.

The subordinated personhood that Berlant defines is constituted by both legal and non-legal means and sources. The formal exclusion of a person or entire group from citizenship is one example of a nation-state's determination through law of which lives it will protect and which lives it will not concern itself with. The particular structure of the modern Westphalian nation-state facilitates the separation of populations and simultaneously renders the circumstances of those excluded especially precarious and vulnerable. In addition, less overt and institutionalized means of exclusion, such as various systems of oppression, similarly function to marginalize individuals and groups from meaningfully belonging to the citizenry of a nation-state, or to the common condition of humanity in general. The question directing the study of the three photographs included in this dissertation is therefore to what extent can the spectator overcome the various barriers that construct a separation between herself and an Other in order to recognize their fundamental interrelationality, based on their shared humanity.

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